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SCRIPTURE WORTHIES:

THEIR CHARACTERS

VIEWED IN A NEW LIGHT

BY THE REV.

P. SPENCER WHITMAN, D. D.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Rev. Charles Manly, D. D.

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PREFACE.

The writer of these chapters has been for many years studying the Scriptural accounts of these, and other worthies, to see whether the accepted opinions concerning them were correct.

He has been surprised to discover how different was the fact, and that much light has been obscured by popular commentators.

If these pages shall encourage a more careful inspection of God's Word, and enable the reader to see more clearly the high value and distinguished excellence of some lives that have been long under expository censure, the writer will enjoy a sufficient reward for his effort to such an end.

This volume may be followed by others, aiming to give independent conceptions of New Testament history and teaching.

P. S. WHITMAN.

Toccoa, Ga.

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INTRODUCTION.

Biography, especially Scripture biography, will always be interesting and instructive. It is rightly employed, by those who give direction to the studies of the young in our Sunday-schools, for making the Bible attractive and thereby turning attention to its profoundest teachings. The biography of the Bible differs from that found anywhere else, in the accuracy of its representation of the characters of those it presents to us, and it is worthy of our most careful and candid study.

There was a time, perhaps, when, because many Scripture personages are unquestionably set before us as the people of God, it was thought necessary to justify every action recorded of them, and to show that, even if it did not in each instance meet with the direct approval of God, the case was so far exceptional as to make it no longer of any value to us in determining our duty or in testing our character. This sometimes required such a distortion of principles of righteousness, which ought to be recognized as immutable as to make them appear mutable, and of uncertain application in the affairs of our every-day life.

A reaction from this method is seen in the tendency nowadays to seize upon individual acts of in-

firmity, or upon conduct different from that which modern standards altogether approve, and by magnifying every weakness, and separating it from its connections, make it appear such a crime that one wonders how such characters could in any sense be considered righteous and be properly called the people of God. The flippancy with which serious charges of fault are made, and which distinguishes many late writers—sometimes, alas! of those who prepare the Sunday-school lessons for our young people—is most painful to devout and thoughtful minds, and is sure to do great harm to those who get accustomed to this treatment of the history of men and women “of whom,” according to the unerring judgment of God, “the world was not worthy.”

Its evil influence is further seen in the way that many have come to look even on our blessed Lord, who, instead of being regarded as the holy and absolutely perfect one,—appointed to be Judge of all because He is the Son of Man, John v. 27,—must needs be apologized for, and some of whose holiest and most godlike acts must be explained as instances of the infirmities of His human nature.

It is in earnest protest against this method of treatment that the articles compiled in this volume have been written. They have, indeed, been composed at different times and for different occasions; but having the same general purpose and being based on the same principle of candid interpretation of the Scripture narrative in *all* its particulars, it is well that they are collected, so as to lead students of

the Bible to take more careful views of those who are presented in its pages as specimens of real men and women, in whom the grace of God was operating to redeem them from the dominion of sin, and to show how we, too, may be made "more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

Let us bear in mind that if we are to be really profited by the biographies of the Bible we must study each character in all its connections with the fairness and candor to which a perfectly impartial record is entitled.

Whether each one who reads this volume will agree in every particular with the views expressed by the venerable man who gives us in it the fruits of his maturest and devoutest thought is not so important as that its character and purpose shall be recognized and that we shall be led to more careful, accurate, and just study of the living Word of the Living God.

Charles Manly.

Greenville, S. C.

I.

NOAH.

Enoch and Noah compared; or, was Noah a drunkard?

Bad as the world is, there have been at all times persons of remarkable virtue, and more or less commended by their fellow men; more than this, there have been men and women commended by God, whose commendation has been marked by miraculous testimony. What a record we have of Enoch! According to the reference of Jude the world had become very wicked; yet Enoch persevered, preaching righteousness, and there could have been no lack in his practice, for the divine record is that "he walked with God, after he begat Methuselah, three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters; and all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years." What additional commendation as the record ends, "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." His approbation, we see, was most decidedly of God. What an admonition to the world is here, wherein is seen the difference in God's estimation between Enoch and the rest of mankind. This delineation of Enoch's character and the manner of God's approbation are so

remarkable that we can hardly expect any mortal ever to shine in fairer light.

We make this reference to Enoch by way of introduction to the character of Noah. With the physical improvement of the race immediately subsequent to the time of Enoch, the world became more wicked than ever—so wicked that God said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.” “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Hear further: “Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God.” Now a writer of eminence makes Enoch’s commendation superior to this, because it is said, “Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years.” Here, it is proper to say, we do not know but that Enoch walked with God more than three hundred years, for he may have walked with God before he begat Methuselah as well as after. And as for Noah, we do not know but that he walked with God six hundred years. The Scripture quoted seems to present this walking with God as the general character of his life. It is said of Enoch that he walked with God three hundred years; but it does not diminish his high rank in goodness to suppose it was equaled or even surpassed by that of Noah. Men had become, in the time of Noah, altogether more violent and desperate in wickedness. His conflict with sin must have been sharper and more troublesome than that of Enoch; and we must remember it was nearly three times as long; and if, in commendation of his life it is said, “Noah was a just

man and perfect in his generation," with the most significant item added, "and Noah walked with God," we think Noah's exaltation is presented as no less wonderful than Enoch's.

But Enoch's distinctive eminence shines in the record, "He was not, for God took him." And this is not said of Noah. But God's regard for him was shown in another way. When we think of God's bringing on the flood, overwhelming the earth with water, and yet the ark with Noah and his family riding secure on the universal abyss—he and his family alone saved to start the human race anew—all this, it seems to us, is making Noah more distinguished by God than as if it could be said of him as of Enoch, "He was not, for God took him."

We come now to a point wherein Noah is supposed to suffer vastly in comparison with Enoch. The latter, it is said, is one of the few men whose record in Scripture is all on the credit side. The language descriptive of him is altogether the language of encomium. "He stands charged with no fault." Now if all this were equally true of Noah, it would make his excellence more remarkable than Enoch's; for the life of Noah was nigh six hundred years longer than that of Enoch, the people had become more abandoned to lust and violence than in the days of Enoch, making his conflict with vice more formidable and trying. Moreover his history is given with ten times the minuteness that characterizes that of Enoch, so that if there were follies or wrongs they would be altogether more apt to come to the surface.

All this would make Noah more wonderful than Enoch if, in his case, as in Enoch's, inspiration records no flaw in his character.

Some moralizers are fond of allusions to the time when Noah lay overcome with stupor and uncovered in his tent. But who does not know that the divine pen is here recording the sin of Ham and that it is farthest possible from the intimation of wrong on the part of Noah? It is human pens and human tongues that here, with no particle of Scriptural warrant, write and talk of Noah's sin, whereas the sacred narrative dwells alone on the sin of Ham and its consequences. It is because the Lord is God that He is not found complaining of Jesus for breaking the Sabbath, or of Noah, when by experience he first learned the stupefying nature of the beverage which his new vineyard had brought into use. If anyone supposes that Enoch's three-hundred-year walk with God means no inadvertence, like taking a wrong path and getting lost, or doing nothing which his judges, in this nineteenth century after Christ, might construe to his disadvantage, he is as much mistaken as any Pharisee that has ever passed judgment upon Christian morals.

We may have a certain degree of forbearance with teachers and expositors who may be quite too fond of detecting flaws in the best characters; but when a preacher, taking occasion to dilate on the sins of good men, makes the fling which we sometimes hear, "There was Noah the drunkard," or "Noah who disgraced himself and brought a curse upon his

family by getting beastly drunk," we can hardly express our resentment, for it is a libel of the most aggravating character. It is derisive of God and should be revolting to every candid reader of His Word.

What is fact in the case? Somebody was to learn by experience that if guided by thirst or taste alone he might drink so much of the new beverage as to make him intensely drowsy or reduce him to utter stupefaction. Noah's case is plainly regarded, such is the tenor of the narrative, as an affair not necessarily involving blame any more than when a child, overdrinking of milk, falls into a deep slumber, Noah was no more a sinner than the man who first learned that caution is needed lest, when suffering with heat or thirst, one should drink of cold water to excess. The life of Noah, which was continued three hundred years after this experience, offers no reasonable chance for us to suppose anything else than that he used the experience of that occasion for the benefit of his family. Nay, it is but fair to infer that his descendants at the very start, in repeopling the earth received due caution from Noah against all kinds of excessive indulgence. We may go further and safely conclude that, if before he died that preacher of righteousness found that there was no such thing as using the beverage in moderation, or keeping it from poisonous adulterations, he may have become quite radical in his admonition, and have ended his days a preacher of total abstinence.

In our day it is, indeed against a man's character to get drunk even once. It supposes a voluntary mingling with bad company, deliberately going where poisonous intoxicants are kept; and this amid warnings of danger and ruin all around him—a state of things which did not exist in relation to Noah. But even in our day, if it is only once in his life that a person gets drunk, is it to be expected that thousands of years after he must be stigmatized as a drunkard? If we seek a man most to be relied on for temperance, it may be the man of whom it is said, "He got drunk once, but never again."

It is only common virtue to put a favorable construction upon a man's conduct when the circumstances in the case will permit. But in the case of Noah the circumstances *demand* it. And the violation of this rule in respect to him should be abhorrent to all mankind.

II.

LOT.

I.—*The Separation of Abraham and Lot.*

The story of Abraham opens, himself the hero, but Lot the charm of it. Uncle and nephew by birth, they continue twins in goodness until the separation. The particulars of this event are given to show, as most of the commentators would have us think, how the two suddenly diverged from each other, not only in place of abode, but in moral character. From this time Abraham is represented by them as the uncle—"noble, generous, magnanimous." Lot as the nephew,—“selfish, grasping, mean.” And the new character here given to Lot is made to decide the moral quality of all his future actions. To the end of his life no opportunity is omitted to reproach him with a sordid motive. Thus all along through life the misfortune with him is made to lie back in that separation.

This is what we are now to examine. We shall consider the subject, first supposing the common understanding of expositors is correct, that the valley now occupied by the Dead Sea is one of the two parts denoted in the text by “right” and “left,” (a fallacy to be considered in its place), and that the hill or

mountain country, Canaan, Gen. xiii. 12, is the other.

FIRST VIEW.

The separation was at Abraham's suggestion—the plan for carrying it out, also his. Lot, it is admitted, fell in with the suggestion and complied with the arrangement. These being the facts in the case, for Abraham afterwards to have been found complaining would have declared him the most unreasonable of men. But Abraham was never known to give the slightest intimation of there being any wrong on the part of Lot—a *third* fact worthy of note. And, with these three facts before them, what shall we say of those who make complaint *for* Abraham, accusing Lot, for the part he took in that transaction, of being “selfish,” “grasping,” “taking advantage of his uncle's generous nature”? Such a complaint, it seems to us, is unbecoming reasonable men.

SECOND VIEW.

We may justly suppose that *the aim of Abraham in his arrangement was that both parties should be perfectly satisfied*. We think the previous harmony between them shows that he must have been skilled in arrangements to such an end. This purpose was sufficiently worthy without attributing to him any intention of being *generous*. No better proof is needed that this was the object in view than the perfect adaptation of his arrangement to that end. There is room enough; and Abraham says, “If thou

wilt take to the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." No words could better have signified that it would make no difference with him which part Lot took. This left no possibility for *Abraham* to be otherwise than perfectly satisfied whichever part Lot should take. Nothing remains in order to the full accomplishment of his purpose but for Lot to take the part *he likes the better*. If he does *not* do this, we cannot rely upon his being satisfied and Abraham's plan will be frustrated. Abraham himself will not be satisfied. If he does not do this, it may seem to Abraham like regarding his words under the color of deceit. Every consideration makes it becoming in Lot to take the part he likes better. We presume he did so, for he seems to have taken the part better adapted to his occupation. The river and the brooks *did* attract his eyes, and he pushed into the valley, pleased with the thought of them, and it no doubt increased the satisfaction of Abraham and Sarah that he went away in good spirits. As for any undue desire of gain, he appears to have been as innocent as the shepherd boy who, instead of leaving his flocks to scanty and withered herbage, leads them on to some green oasis. Thus Abraham's purpose was achieved in full.

THIRD VIEW.

The position uniformly assumed that one part was greatly superior to the other, and making this position the basis of Abraham's generosity is, in the first place,

embarrassing to Abraham himself, for he must have been conscious of this superiority or there would have been no generosity in the case, but the words of the proposal imply, not only that he would as soon have one part as the other, but that in his view, all things considered, one part was as good as the other. Thus to make him generous we have to take from him his sincerity. He would prefer, we think, that we let his sincerity alone.

But the assumption that one part was greatly superior to the other is turned to a worse account than to make Abraham generous. Lot, they say, takes the better part, and therefore they denounce him as "selfish, ungrateful and mean." Abraham is generous and even magnanimous for *making* the offer: Lot, selfish and mean for accepting it. Here we beg leave to demur. No true ethics have ever made the mere acceptance of a good offer mean. More kindly natures have been chilled, more friendships interrupted, more peace destroyed, by refusing good offers than by accepting them. Fannie comes home from school with a luscious apple which Jennie gave her. Jennie's parents are poor. "And was that the only apple she had?" "It was." "Child," exclaims the mother, "you should not have taken it. It was selfish and ungenerous in you." "Yes, mother," says the little mistress in ethics, "but I thought of all those scuppernongs uncle sent us, and I knew you would be willing for me to take her a few clusters of them to-morrow." She did this—and what a new relation sprung up between the two girls—a friend-

ship to last through life. The apple caused it, because it was not refused. Take Lot's own case—call Abraham's proposal generous: have it that Lot did *not* accept in the manner he did: notice how it might have embarrassed him to give a reason which would not have been a reflection upon Abraham. Would it do to intimate that his uncle *could not* afford it—thus calling into question his ability to understand his own affairs? Would it do to intimate that he did not really mean what he said, thus making his magnanimity to consist in big talk, a kind of Arab bombast? Would it do to even dream of a *sinister* motive, as if Abraham, in advance, was making a hush-offering to Lot, so that he would not “vex his soul” with certain domestic improprieties about to follow? Or, would it do to admit that he was deterred by the fear of being placed under obligation to *such* a man as Abraham? Thus it becomes quite obvious that, as in the case of the school-girl, so in respect to Lot, in no way could he have managed more becomingly, or so as to have been less chargeable for lack of generosity than to have acted just as he did. If afterwards Abraham had become poor, who can say there would have been no *scuppernong clusters* to make it all right?

Put it down, the ethics which make it mean to accept a good offer are false. They make *generous* offers impossible. How can an offer be *generous*, if to accept it declares a man *mean*? More than this, they turn what is commonly understood as generous offers into insults. According to these ethics Lot

could have reflected, "You make me this *generous* offer, do you? At the same time you know well enough you would accuse me of being mean should I accept it. How then can I regard your offer otherwise than as an insult?"

The acceptance of an offer must be expected or it cannot be generous; and, if it should come to be understood that the acceptance makes one liable to the charge of meanness, what person, however generous, would ever make a *generous* offer? Thus the ethics of Lot's detractors would secure us against all chances of erring as he did.

But it is their darling theory, and how they cling to it, "If Lot had possessed the noble nature of his uncle, he would have taken the poorer part." Here is some comfort after all, comfort for the elegant girl who *did* choose the most worthless of her suitors for her husband. Let no one murmur as if she "threw herself away," for, by *her* choice she rose to the "noble nature" of Abraham. It was always a wonder that my old acquaintance in the East, coming into this new country, did accept, at the offer of the government, a rough and stony place for his farm instead of a rich and level tract lying by the side of it, which he could have had at the same price. I understand now; *he* had the "noble nature of his *uncle*." Here, too, is revealed something quite creditable to the Baptists of a former generation. They did choose every out-of-the-way place for a meeting-house. They could have had central locations just as well as not, but—we see it now—their "noble natures" forbade. We

are becoming as bad as Lot. Now, when a town proprietor gives us our choice of lots, we follow Lot's example—take the *best* lot—the “selfish, grasping wretches that we are!

FOURTH VIEW.

After long and loud denunciation of Lot as “greedy” for taking the better part, his detractors are suddenly berating him as “foolish” for taking the part he did. This *better* part turns out to be a *foolish* part—a *worse* part—the part beset with trouble and danger—fire and brimstone! Yet this very part—this accursed part—he should have left to Abraham: and, if he only had done so, it would have made him Abraham's equal, and stamped his character as generous forever. There is nothing like detraction to bring these jewels of consistency into fair display.

FIFTH VIEW.

There is a way of contemplating this transaction so as to make Abraham appear generous. The only objection that can be offered to it is that it makes Lot generous also. Without calling Abraham's sincerity into question, Lot's intuitive sense might have detected in his uncle, or in Sarah, a lurking preference for one part over the other. Now it could not have been the part chosen by Lot. The place where they were was already Abraham's selection, *his* choice. Though one part was essentially as good as the other, yet it might be a sacrifice of feeling to give up the place already sacred to them. They did

not know but Lot might have feelings to be consulted, also. Thus the offer may be considered as waiving their feelings (not right, or temporary advantage) and essentially saying, "Here, Lot, is a goodly place and you may prefer to keep right along where you are; if you do, we will go yonder." But Lot would not allow this. He thought it would be a greater trial for his uncle to leave than he was aware of. He was the younger—it belonged to *him* to try a new place. He did so, *journeying* into the valley and pleased withal, as we have said. This view of the affair is in keeping with all that we know of the two men up to this time. It is beautiful, each showing a delicate regard for the feelings of the other. It is *generous* Abraham, and it is also *generous* Lot. Who would have it otherwise?

ANOTHER VIEW.

It is possible that the nature of Lot's choice has not been fairly comprehended. The idea that the "plain of Jordan" is one of those parts designated by Abraham as "the left" and "the right," may be entirely erroneous. We have seen all along that the separation has not appeared to be according to the terms of his proposal. "If thou depart to the right, I will go to the left." Lot departed and, "*journeyed*," which is *more* than those terms indicated; but Abraham seems to have stayed pretty much where he was; which is *less* than those terms indicated. Again, this idea that "the plain" was one of the parts supposes that, at the time of the arrange-

ment, Abraham and Lot were on the line between "the plain" and hill or mountain country, but they were not. They were about *midway* between the Jordan and the Great Sea. I have no idea that when Abraham spake of "the right" and "the left," he had a thought of the Jordan valley. The country to the east, before coming to the valley, was ample enough for one; the country west, ample enough for the other.¹ Situated as they were, the proposal anticipated no "*journeying*" of either party—no occupancy of the valley by either; but that they both were to remain in the hill country: both *moving* indeed, but neither "*journeying*." But the separation turns out to be a different thing. How are we to account for it? Only in this way. *Lot never accepted the proposition.*" When it was made, discreet and wise as it was (and it may have been generous also), it is said "Lot lifted up his eyes," implying a *distant* survey. It was so—to look from that place afterwards known as Sichem (Sychar) to that part of the valley contemplated. The scene greets his imagination as, no doubt, he saw it on his return from Egypt. And now the *answer to the*

¹ More probable it is that Abraham, in making the proposal, is supposed to face the east. This would exclude the Jordan valley from consideration, or at least leave it as much to the one as to the other: the arrangement being for one to "depart to the north, and the other to go to the south." We here quote from the learned Dr. W. H. Young. "In Hebrew the Mediterranean is called the 'hinder sea.' And the proper name of Southern Arabia is Arabia *Yemen* which strictly means right hand, though the other meaning of '*Yemen*,' namely, 'happy' has been perpetuated in the name 'Arabia Felix.'"

proposition is not given—this link in the narrative is left for the common sense of the reader to supply. It may have been about as follows: “There is no need, uncle, of your going either right or left, or being put to the trouble of moving at all. Here you built your first altar, and when you passed on and went into Egypt, I know how you longed to return, how glad you were to get back. Stay where you are. I will take neither right nor left. Yonder stretches all that valley of the Jordan—enough for me, certainly. There is the river and all the brooks—no need to dig wells or draw water there; and it will break up all communication between our herdsmen, for certain.” This answer is supported by what followed.

1. Lot is represented as immediately “journeying” off.

2. Abraham is *not* so represented, as everyone must have noticed; *he* appears to have stayed where he was.

3. Immediately after the separation it is said “Abraham dwelled in the land of Canaan,” just where he had been, the only difference being that Lot was not with him. “And *Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain.*”

4. Notice what the Lord said to Abraham, “*After that Lot was separated from him, ‘Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it.’*” No Lot there either to the right or to the left.

5. Notice also, the Lord says further to Abraham. "Walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it." Probably it was not till he had done this that he made any essential change in his residence and finally gave preference to Mamre. Thus, when he *did* move, it was not in a direction *opposite* to that which Lot had taken, but very nigh the same. From that first "place of the altar" to Mamre the direction does not appear to vary more than thirty degrees from the straight line to Sodom. *They never departed the one to the right hand and the other to the left.*

All these circumstances bring us to the conclusion that whilst Abraham, in his proposal to Lot, acted in conformity with all his past character, as thoroughly decent, generous, and wise, yet Lot, instead of choosing the "best part," *took neither*; unwilling that his uncle should be disturbed in what was already his chosen abode, *he vacated the whole to him.* The more we consider the subject, the more apparent it becomes that there is no possible reason for contemplating those worthies otherwise than as equals in high moral worth—so linked together in goodness that to praise the one is to commend the other: and as for censuring Lot, they who presume to do it should never venture one solitary encomium upon his uncle.

II.—*Lot in Sodom.*

"He did one thing that was very wrong: he went to live in a city called Sodom." Reflection.—"Keep out of Sodom."

The above is about the mildest censure passed upon Lot in the expositions for Sabbath-schools: and this appears to be the common view entertained concerning his residence in Sodom. We think it unreasonable, unscriptural, and that the idea of his being regarded in any sense as a warning was altogether foreign to the divine purpose. We are referred to the time when Lot first *looked* toward Sodom, and are told that, in his choice of the plain, "worldly advantage was his consideration." To this grave censure we say, What of it? Is the worthy Christian who carries on business in one street instead of another ashamed to tell you it is because he can make more money there? And here comes a blessed, good emigrant to the prairies—"What have you come for?" Is he ashamed to say it is to better his temporal condition? I respect that minister who said he had *a call* to Bristol and should go: for *there* he could have eight hundred dollars, and where he was, he was not quite sure of having anything. There is no man so saintly but he is found now and then doing something for his "temporal advantage." Lot's was the most innocent case imaginable. He was going where he would not have to dig wells or draw water. There is more reason to call him a shirk than a worldling.

The next censure is, that by advancing into "the plain" he showed a "disregard for religious privileges." But if a trial is pending upon this point, we must go to the separation—for those worthies, both uncle and nephew, could have shown regard for religious privileges only by keeping together; and we

must ask, Who first proposed the separation? Not Lot. Still they do say he showed a shocking willingness to encounter wicked society. Now, this censure is made by those who suppose "the plain" one of the parts designated by Abraham in his proposal; *he*, then, had shown himself perfectly willing to risk the society of the plain. Why, then, blame one and not the other? For both are in the same category.

We do not care how bad the place a man resides in; we have no right to accuse him of hazarding his virtue for gain if, whilst pursuing an honest calling, he continues firm in his religious principles, and blameless in his example. It is a recommendation to a youth to dwell in this city, if, amid its vices, he clings to that purity which he brought with him from his country home. We have seen the godly man giving up his comfortable home, surrounded by the best Christian influence, to dwell in a rude cabin amid the moral desolations of the frontier. Now we do not care what his aim was in this change; if, the change being made and finding himself in bad society, he seeks to improve it by frowning on vice and encouraging virtue, we find no fault with him. It is not God's economy to centralize the good. His policy is aggressive and He carries it out by scattering His worthies; some in one place, some in another, and—was it wrong that He should have just one in Sodom? That the passage, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly," was brought in to show the guilt of Lot in pitching his tent towards that place, is an unjust inference. *God* may have

known that such was their character whilst Abraham and Lot were perfectly unconscious of it. True scholarship, we think, understands the passage as introduced to prepare the mind of the reader for what is coming; as much as to say, "These are the circumstances which show how innocently Lot came to reside in a wicked city, destined to be destroyed." The charge, then, that Lot took up his residence in Sodom facing all its wickedness and corruption for the sake of worldly gain, has scarcely the poor plea to support it that *it might have been so*. He *might* have erred when he *looked*, when he *chose*, when he pitched his *tent towards*, but there is nothing in the description of events as given by Moses, in the nature of things, or reason of the case, to justify the censure. We could as well make accusation against the best men that ever lived, if only it can be proved that they laid their plans judiciously for an honest livelihood.

But preachers will have it that Lot entered Sodom "dazzled with the prospect of gain." And that God, by way of punishment, had him scooped up by the hosts of Chedorlaomer, him and his goods, and carried off himself and the women as prisoners. This, they say, "was meant as a warning for him to quit the place." But such an idea is incongruous with the Word. Who does not regard Abraham's rescue of Lot as a grand achievement—his return with Lot and the women, Melchizedek coming out to meet them and honoring the occasion with the bread and wine? (Sarah and that trusty servant Eliezer may have been there also.) It may have been the last time Abraham

ever saw Lot, a scene rarely surpassed in moral loveliness—tender—unworldly enough, after forty centuries, to detach our minds from earth in the hope we ourselves may yet commingle with the same spirits around the eternal Melchizedek in the “King’s Dale” above. But how that achievement loses its grandeur, and the honor paid to it by Melchizedek becomes void of beauty and fitness—how we feel our souls robbed, and God and His Word robbed, by the imputation that he, for whom the exploit was made and its success so honored, was only a “greedy worldling” whose very presence in Sodom was offensive to God! The moment we bring ourselves to think it a wrong—a “great wrong for Lot to be in Sodom,” the exploit of Abraham in restoring him to his abode there becomes inglorious, and the honor paid to it by Melchizedek entirely out of place.

Ere long we find that God could not destroy the city whilst Lot remained in it; and yet detractors see no compliment to Lot in this. We have heard of priceless men, for whom God would save a city, but never knew before that those men are to be condemned for having gone to the city, or for remaining there. The day before the overthrow, Abraham, concerned for the fate of Lot, drew from God an expression of His intended policy, namely, that He would spare the city for the sake of the righteous however few there might be of them. (Abraham by *approximation* arrived at the conclusion that the city would be saved for the sake of Lot alone. See Gen. xix. 29, in connection with xviii. 23–33.)

What follows? He resolves to destroy the city, but cannot do it whilst one certain man remains there—no greater praise ever conferred upon a mortal—whereupon He has this man removed, and because He did not destroy the city until he was removed, He considered—and He knew Abraham would so consider it—equivalent to saving the city for his sake. God then would *save the city because he was in it*, yet, as expositors have it, it was a *very wrong thing for him to be in Sodom*. Yes, they tell us he must have been corrupt declare him “demoralized,” and bid the young take warning from Lot to “keep out of Sodom.” This is virtually scandalizing God before the young. They who censure Lot for being in Sodom, should know they have no right to do so unless he *became corrupt*, and, as if they understood this, they proceed to have it that he *did* become corrupt, applying to him the Scripture: “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,”—presenting on the blackboard the process of his fall. “He *looked*”—“he *chose*”—“*tended toward*”—“*in Sodom*.” What of it all? Nothing, unless he *sunk* in Sodom; therefore they virtually accuse him of this, and reaccuse him when they hold him up as a man to be shunned—make him a *warning*—speaking of him as “demoralized,” “unworthy of respect.” All this is virtual denial of God’s Word—more than this: it accuses God of a great blunder, as much as to say, when *He* goes about selecting the precious man for whom He would spare a city that righteousness may be exalted, it turns out to be a low-rate specimen, an

egregious worldling lurking in the city for the most groveling purposes. No man, Christian or infidel, ever took a position beset with so much inconsistency as to arraign Lot for being in Sodom.

Let us pursue the facts—something further *we know*. The angels enter Sodom on their visit of inspection—enter as *men*. They do not have to *search* for Lot. How soon he is at their side! How quick his eye to recognize the godly! How prompt his heart and hand to extend to them his sympathy and aid! Did they suspect that it was a wrong thing for such a man to be in Sodom? He would not hear to their running any risks by staying in the streets. His house was their asylum. These things *we know*, and it would be ungenerous in any reader not to understand from these events as the Apostle understood (Heb. viii. 2), namely, that it was Lot's habitual practice thus to be on the lookout for any who might need the aid of a friend in that city. Was it wrong that there should be just one such man there? I would that every tongue that has intimated any such idea would murmur its apology to the world. There are men and women of the same stamp in this day in Chicago, in New York and all our cities; priceless they are, and what would cities be without them? And who will dare tell us it is wrong for them to be there? To talk in this way is to cloud the face of virtue in gloom, to freeze the blood in her veins. It is to call an Apostle (as well as Abraham) to account for commending this very man when he said to the Hebrews, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers,

for *some* have thereby entertained angels unawares."

But more: Lot could *risk his life* in the protection of the innocent—venture amid a delirious mob, remonstrating with them, employing every art to dissuade them from their vicious purposes. And again, was it wrong that there should be just one such hero in that city? To give protection to the friendless is one grand virtue; to remonstrate with the wicked is another; and these combined make the *Christian* hero. The Apostle tells us this was Lot's custom "from day to day." And that any *Christian* pen, *after invoking the aid of the Holy Spirit*, ("Sunday-school man," in *The Examiner*) should apply to this very man the sneering words "selfish," "cowardly," "demoralized," provokes a holy indignation. A pen so false to truth, if not thrown away entirely, should have a long furlough from the service of Biblical exposition.

As to Lot's expedient to divert the mob from their purpose in respect to his guests, by proposing to surrender his daughters, there are two constructions to be put upon it without making him at all "infamous." If there had been any remains of decency in the crowd, such a proposal would have shamed them out of their purpose; and in the expectation of such a result he may have made it—perhaps without duly considering the risk he was running. We may look upon it as an unsafe expedient. Seemingly, too, Abraham imperiled the chastity of his wife. (Gen. xii. 19.) But we can afford to spare our censure in respect to both, in the reflection that they understood

better than we do the nature of the parties they dealt with, and knew best whether they were incurring any dangers beyond what wisdom and virtue would dictate.

Next, we may suppose that, from the time the guests entered his house, Lot may have become aware of their character as superhuman; under this supposition the expedient may be regarded as meritorious. He is willing to sacrifice his family honor (more than Abraham ever sacrificed *for God*) to the honor of these visitors from heaven. Where a man of our day is found (a rare event) to prefer the honor of the church above the honor of his family it is an approach to the virtue of Lot. This view makes a contrast between the uncle and the nephew in favor of the latter. Abraham seemed to risk the purity of his wife for a temporal advantage. Lot did risk his life, and seemed willing to put his daughters in jeopardy, rather than that insult should be offered to angelic guests. Herein was virtue more free from the dross of human frailty than we commonly find it.

We come next to the passage, "He seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." Note the comments: "The man who had so long neglected to *warn* is not believed now." "How conscience must have stung him as he went back." "*His life was such* that when he warned his sons-in-law," etc. Now men who, like these expositors, can make accusations without a particle of evidence to sustain them, are indeed mockers of truth, but we doubt whether they have any conscience to sting them.

The expositors fairly gloat over their chance for detraction when they come to those terrible words, "he *lingered*." "Oh, that cord that bound him," they exclaim, "the love of the world!" They dwell much upon what "Lot lost," and are no doubt troubled about it—much more troubled than Lot was himself. They must have it that, like Achan, he wanted to save some precious thing. They do judge, no doubt, others by themselves. As for Lot, he never craved their commiseration for anything he lost.

Recall the scene. The first part of the night spent in remonstrating with the mob—then, at the direction of the angels, he went out in search of his "sons-in-law," and failing to bring them back with him, he but reaches his home when the angels bid him haste, saying, "Take thy wife and thy two daughters which are here." Now, the first direction (Chap. xix. 12) implied that quite a number were to escape, and perhaps that supplies were also to be taken out, and time given; but with this *second* direction, how much comes upon him at once; the flight is *now*, no waiting for these "sons-in-law" to change their mind. What! Only those four to escape? And with no supplies? We have no doubt they were human, and that they may all have acted as if they did not know what they were about.

But, blended with the censure for "lingering" is another reproach. "Why did he not put straight to Mamre?" "Ah," says the spiteful interpreter, "he was ashamed to do that, because he had lost everything he had. He was too proud to appear before

Abraham poor!" Where, again, does the expositor derive these notions except from his own impure breast? The truth in the case presents quite a different reason why Lot did not at once repair to Abraham. The record of Lot's escape shows that Sodom was situated on the eastern acclivity from the plain. Therefore the nearest escape to safety was eastward, away from Mamre. No one need doubt but when flight was first proposed to Lot he thought of nothing else but hurrying to Mamre. When, therefore, he found the time so short and the danger so great as to forbid any attempt to cross the plain, in order to reach Mamre, may not this very circumstance account for his confusion? At first it may have seemed that the angels were leading the wrong way. It may have been hard for him to understand that time would not be given to cross the plain. This was possibly the hardest thing for him to comprehend—not that the angels were leading him and his family away from Sodom, but away from Abraham. How soon the fiery sea was rolling between him and Abraham, and for aught we know he was severed from him forever. And as for Abraham, when on that morning he went out and stood where the day before he had received that pledge from Jehovah, now looking towards Sodom and Gomorrah, beholding the smoke as it went up like the smoke of a furnace, who can say but Abraham himself "lingered," confused by the course events had taken, left at that time and perhaps for a long period, without the knowledge of Lot's escape? And when, eventually,

it was made known to him how God, by "sending Lot out from the midst of the overthrow" had virtually kept His word—saved the city for his sake—who knows how far this discovery may have assisted his faith and made him move straight forward when afterwards he was called to the sacrifice of his son, knowing that, as there had been *an escape* in the case of Lot, God could plan another in behalf of Isaac?

There is one censure upon Lot which we would suppose the offspring of hate—the sneering taunt that he was never able to "count a single convert." We freely grant that this sublime end of godly service—seeing how many converts *he could count*—Lot probably never thought of. He probably never dreamed of any "special call to the ministry," or of having publicly been set apart thereto, and though "vexed," it was not upon questions pertaining to "success," or "salary." But if it be found that he did what every man is bound to do by virtue of his "ordination" as a child of God, we give him high rank in the ministry. If he was one of those rarest and most valued of servants whose example was right—who could do as he had opportunity, ever ready to defend virtue, recognizing right, and frowning on wrong, and this for right's own sake and God's, converts or no converts, he was one of God's noblemen—a genuine preacher of righteousness.

And yet, this very reflection cast upon Lot betrays the consciousness on the part of his accusers of there being something to lead to the impression that he was virtually a preacher. Something of this sort

there is, and enough of it. Our Saviour puts him side by side with Noah. "The day that Noah went into the ark the flood came." "The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone out of heaven." No other view can be entertained than that Lot occupied the same relation in respect to the Sodomites that Noah occupied in respect to the antedeluvians of his time. The people of Nineveh *repented* at the preaching of Jonah and were saved. Why were not the people of Sodom and Gomorrah saved? They were less obdurate than the people of Capernaum, but why were they not saved? A prophet tells us plainly, "They repented not." (Jer. xx. 30.) But who *preached* to them but Lot? He had no converts indeed, and this was the very reason they were destroyed. The very commentators that arraign Lot for no converts, tell us that if there had been *ten righteous* (and to have been such they must have been *converts*) the city would have been saved. This clears the skirts of Lot—pays him the highest compliment as a preacher. We think vastly of an evangelist if, after a four weeks' campaign, he (not God) numbers a hundred converts; but what should we think if, after such a campaign, there being no converts, the city should be burned up, himself, however, removed into safety by the hands of angels? But there is a certainty as to Lot's character in the premises. We have noticed what the angels saw of *Lot*. Now, what of the *people*? They were so *hardened* that Lot's example, his persuasions, and his remonstrances had no effect upon them. This was

precisely what the angels *saw* of the people, and *herein* they found that the sin of Sodom was very great according to the "cry of it." And therefore not a word more was to be said; only, showing every possible consideration for Lot and his family, the city was forthwith to be destroyed. Lot was, and had been, the genuine preacher of righteousness—faithful—self-denying—persevering—dauntless. And shall *Christian* people hold him up as a subject of scandal, a character to be shunned, and load him with reproaches because he went and lived in Sodom?

In conclusion, as his detractors have expressed "the hope that Lot *did* repent before he died," our anxiety settles to *them*, instead of him. Long since *he* passed the period of his probation, and hope for him is needless: but as for these other sinners who are still in probation, may they improve a part of it in sincere repentance for their virtual denial of God's Word in calumniating Lot, because "he went and dwelled in a city called Sodom."

III.—*Initial misconceptions as to Abraham's concern for Sodom.*

The following paragraph shows how an able editor follows in the common track of moralizers on Abraham's supposed regard for Sodom.

Abraham's Prayer.—Abraham prayed for Sodom, yet the city was not spared. There were not ten righteous in the city, even judged by the low standard by which Lot was accounted righteous. Abraham's

prayer was so conditioned that it could not be answered. . . . The 29th verse of Gen. xix. seems to show that Lot was spared, not for his own sake, but for Abraham's. Here is the verse: "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain that God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt."

At last the pen, so habitually correct, has lapsed, all at once, into an expression of several misconceptions, as it seems to us, from the inspection of a paragraph copied in part as above.

In the title itself, the use of the word *prayer* is not quite fortunate. The text (Gen. xviii. 33) calls it "communing." We think the secular press of our time would get it about right and say—Abraham took his opportunity *to interview* the Lord. He was too shrewd to pray before understanding the bearings of the case, so as to know what to pray for, or, indeed—whether to pray at all. In the *interviewing* we see nothing answering to the nature of prayer, but simply an arrival at God's purpose, which must have been eminently satisfactory to Abraham, leaving him nothing to pray for, unless it was a thankful heart.

We note next the first thing asserted. "Abraham prayed for Sodom." We think Abraham never interviewed Jehovah on behalf of Sodom. It was on behalf of the righteous, a few of whom, at least one, he was quite sure lived in that city. Like an able interviewer, he presents his case at once and with great clearness. "Wilt Thou destroy the righteous

with the wicked?" We do not think he is here deftly taking advantage of God's regard for the righteous in order to save the wicked. Yet this must be the understanding if we assert that he was pleading for Sodom.

This construction put on the case leads to another which we consider more unwarranted still. "Abraham's prayer was so conditioned that it could not be answered." But God acted square up to what He allowed Abraham to draw from Him as to His purpose respecting the righteous; for we have warrant to say, that in that interviewing is an example of what is allowed in science; namely, a conclusion justly accepted, though arrived at only by approximation: the conclusion in this case being that for the sake of even the *approximated one* God would not destroy the city. God showed His determination to act square up to *what was approximated* in the interview, when He said, (xix. 22,) "Haste thee—for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither"—till Lot, the *approximated one*, was safe in Zoar.

That pen, therefore, is not quite correct when it says, in effect, the city could not be spared because there were not *ten* righteous in it. It was spared, and had to be spared, so long as *Lot* was there. According as it was "conditioned" in the interview, neither the city nor the plain itself could have been destroyed with *Lot* in it any more than if there had been the "fifty" or a thousand righteous in it.

That pen, still erring, says: "Lot was spared, not for his own sake, but for Abraham's." Now, when

God has fixed upon an endowment which a man must have in order to be saved, and a man has the endowment, and God Himself says he has it, then, when God saves him, what occasion is there for any one to tell us he was saved for some other mortal's sake? Was anything in the fate of Sodom or any of its inhabitants "conditioned" upon Abraham—upon his prayers, his faith, or God's regard for him? If the Sodomites were destroyed on their own account—because they were wicked, just as truly Lot was saved on his own account—because he was righteous. We do not think Gen. xix. 29 shows what is claimed, that "Lot was saved for Abraham's sake." "God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." How can anyone read this and keep the communing of the day previous out of his mind? In that interviewing Abraham had predicated everything on the idea that in order to save the righteous God would have to save the city. Now, the above passage comes in directly after the statement of Abraham's coming out in the morning to stand where the interview occurred and see the smoke going up: and, upon the supposition that, sooner than entertain the idea that Lot had been found defective, he would think that God had forgotten His pledged policy, as drawn from Him on that occasion, the inspired penman says: "No, God did not forget Abraham; but instead of sparing the city as Abraham expected, in order to save Lot, He first got Lot out of the city and then destroyed it." Thus Abraham was taught and all generations are to

know that it is not necessary for God, when He undertakes to save the righteous, to save the wicked also.

The passage quoted, we think, shows us the "communing" in its true light—shows that when the destruction of Sodom was intimated, Abraham's mind turned at once on Lot, and that God, conscious of this, was also thinking of Lot, though his name was suppressed by both. It shows that the conclusion arrived at by Abraham was, as we have stated, an approximated one, and that God so understood it—that God, too, when He destroyed the city, but had first got Lot out of it, considered it equivalent to saving the city for his sake. The policy avowed was not to save the city for Abraham's sake, but to save the city for Lot's sake. He saves Lot *without* saving the city; but does this make it that it was for Abraham's sake?

And the pen we have held in such honor writes: "There were not ten righteous in the city even judged by the low standard according to which Lot was accounted righteous." "*Low standard,*" was it? Abraham judged Lot righteous, or rather *knew* it, and we have reason to suspect his standard was not *low*, the just supposition being that it was regulated by what he knew of the mind of God, for which knowledge his opportunity was distinguished. And how certain, too, the angels were, that Lot was righteous! *Their* standard must have been rather high, for they probably knew, more perfectly than Abraham, the mind of God. The inspired Peter—how was *his*

standard regulated? By the lofty ethics of Christ. But here we are reminded, it was the Lord Himself, the preëxistent Christ, who, in the most signal manner, declared Lot righteous. Any talk, therefore, about the standard by which *He* judged, is irreverent. The Lord is not man. He gets at the truth on such a question, and on all questions, without any standard. To suppose He needs any implies the charge of imperfection.

I have only to say in conclusion—it must be a pen of no common ability that can work into a short paragraph, like the one placed at the head of this article, so many misconceptions upon one subject, that subject being about as plain as Moses and Peter could make it. Indeed, the question as to who makes mistakes does not appear to lie, at this time, so much between Ingersoll and Moses as between learned expositors and God.

IV.—*God's positive assertions, safe interpreters of human actions.*

The record of "*the plain*" has great prominence in the sacred narrative. From first to last, in that record, one man stands out decidedly the object of high consideration with God; all the movements connected with the doom of those cities revolving around him—it is Lot, the central figure in a wonderful system of events. Thus inevitably the attention of each generation, as it passes, is drawn to that one man: and it is on account of his character as

righteous that he is made so conspicuous. All the circumstances, as recorded, conspire to show him righteous in that true sense in which inspiration employs the term.¹ The interview between God and Abraham shows a settled understanding between them that Lot was righteous. His manner of life and his course of action, as disclosed under the inspection of the angels and referred to by the Apostle and Christ Himself, declare him righteous in the strict sense—God's sense. And then God's signal treatment of him, expressly in consideration of his being righteous—all these things make it just as strong a case as could be made. It is Lot, singled out by God, and in the most signal manner, declared righteous.

It was of the utmost importance that Lot's character as righteous should be thus set forth, so as to be forever undisputed; for, upon this depends all the moral power of that wonderful catastrophe of the plain, as a lesson showing God's benign consideration for the righteous in contrast with His awful displeasure with the wicked.

¹ In this connection we do not ignore the origin of Moab and Ammon. Let it suffice, God did not allow the record of that origin to close without the significant testimony "And he perceived it not." (Gen. xix. 33, 35.) As for the "bestly stupefaction on two successive nights," we should note the words "They made their father drink wine." It is not necessary to suppose they lacked in skill to this end by trying different expedients for each night. We think the inspired narrative is such as to leave it only to infidel minds to stigmatize Lot. It is well enough to note, also, that we never read of any slur being cast upon a Moabite or an Ammonite on account of his origin. Certainly, neither David nor any of us have ever thought any the less of Ruth, his ancestral mother, because she was descended from Lot.

Therefore, the moment we begin a course of interpretation in disparagement of *Lot*, we render ourselves liable to be viewed in the attitude of disputing the accuracy of the inspired delineation. We begin to call into question the wisdom of God; we do most certainly commence the work of spoiling the great lesson so much needed for the good of all generations. By impugning every motive, by using all our ingenuity to put a bad construction upon every action of Lot, little by little, we may come, at length, to view him upon a plane of goodness but little removed from the horrid depths to which the Sodomites had sunk; and what then? Of course we shall find ourselves exclaiming, what does God mean by calling such a man righteous? And we may also ask, what has become of that line of distinction between right and wrong, between the righteous and the wicked, which spanned the moral heavens in such grandeur? It has faded away so that it no longer engages the attention of those who look to us for instruction. And what is worse—just in proportion as we bring others to agree with us in this view of Lot we bring them, if they have minds logically inclined, to adopt the conclusion that, if such is the man God singled out as righteous, to stand for the admiration of mankind in bold contrast with his fellows who were doomed to destruction, the whole affair is a most abominable imposition. The idea that God could not proceed with the overthrow until He got such a man into safe quarters is indeed preposterous. If Lot was such a character as the New York *Examiner* over and

over has held up before its hundred thousand readers¹ for them to shun, certainly it was a mistake in God, not to have left him to perish in Sodom. The whole affair of raining fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain was a mistake. It is divested of all its power as a terror to the wicked or an encouragement to the righteous. The critic has indeed spoken of Lot as a "nonentity of the Bible." If that is so, then the righteousness commended of God as exalting a nation, and by which God certainly did exalt that one man, is a nonentity also, and the whole transaction of the plain a miserable farce, and that allusion of our Lord to the high consideration paid to Lot as recorded in Luke xvii. 29, was but the sanction of a great imposition.

But *let the Bible be true; let Lot's character remain* as set forth by inspiration, and the record of Sodom and Gomorrah stands an imperishable monument overlooking the world, where, as the generations of men, one after another, pass along, they see boldly represented the doom of the wicked, to warn them against a life of sin, while far above stands the memorable Lot, rescued from amongst those who perished, lustrous with the benediction of heaven, an everlasting encouragement to the good—there, also, the two inscriptions, each of vast importance to mankind, one declaring the weight of obligation society may owe to the presence of one good man; the other,

¹ "A man for whom no high-toned person could have any respect." "Cowardly, time-serving, greedy of gain, an ingrate and covetous." "A nonentity on the divine page."

how God, when He undertakes to save the righteous' does not necessarily have to save the wicked also.

We think it is high time for Christian expositors to stop and consider the propriety, if they find any trouble in counting Lot righteous, of pursuing the same course in respect to it they do in respect to counting Balaam wicked; namely, let the plain and positive declarations of God interpret all along the actions of his life. And it will be found that they easily chime in together in his exaltation—much more easily than they seem to coalesce in the abasement of Balaam.

V.—*Misconceptions as to facts—which are turned to Lot's disadvantage.*

1. An Error to present Abraham as already in possession of Canaan.

We think Bible expositors should be exact in all their statements, and this, even in matters which may seem of little moment. If possible they should never give the reader a chance to say, "This is not the precise truth."

An expositor for the Sabbath-schools, commenting on the advance of Joshua upon Jericho, speaks of "the land given to Abraham nearly five centuries before." That word "given" does not express the truth, and not only so, the use here made of it may inculcate error in another respect. We have noticed that the expositions on "the separation" run as if Abraham in his lifetime was actual possessor of Canaan, for he was extolled for generosity in making his nephew

the offer he did. But that offer was a simple proposal with nothing in the nature of generosity intended. It was, however, very discreet, providing against any interruption of harmony between the two kinsmen. Let the herds separate; Lot's and his herdsmen taking, say to the right, and Abraham's to the left. Now, by such an arrangement, which would leave no chance for future quarrel between the herdsmen, neither party could be said *to give* anything to the other nor receive anything from him. At that time one had no claim on the land, or the range even, beyond the other. Afterwards Abraham bought of Ephron the field, Machpelah. Beyond this he never presumed to own a foot of land in Canaan. But the land was graciously promised to his posterity. Centuries after, Joshua crossed the Jordan and the promise took effect in the conquest which followed.

True, Moses, addressing the two tribes which proposed to remain in Bashan, uses the expression "which the Lord hath given," but it is as if the time having come for taking possession authorized him to speak as if the promise were fulfilled.

2. An Error to suppose Canaan, the special promise, extended east of the Jordan.

Having spoken of the land as "given to Abraham near five centuries before," the expositor proceeds to tell us how it "extended east of the Jordan." Here seems to be error upon error. Certainly the promised Canaan never extended east of the Jordan.

After Israel, under Joshua, made the conquest, so to speak, of Canaan, two tribes and a half-tribe, ac-

ording to a conditional agreement made with Moses, were allowed to recross the river and occupy the land of Sihon and Og as their possession. But, mark! Moses did not subdue the land of Sihon and of Og as a part of the promised land, but because those kings would not allow a peaceful march through their borders to the promised land. See Num. xxi. 21.

When Moses from Pisgah plead with the Lord, "Let me go over and see the good land," and the Lord hearkened not, but said, "Joshua shall go over before this people; he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see," was Moses already in that land? And was Pisgah, where he stood, *in that land*?

But what, it may be asked, are we to do with a passage like Gen. xv. 18, where God, making a covenant with Abraham, says, "Unto thy seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates"? It means that centuries afterwards—centuries after they had entered the promised land—the *seed* of Abraham did conquer and possess that great extent of territory. It means, too, that this fact is no ground of encouragement, whatever, for any talk that the Canaan, known as the land of promise, extended east of the Jordan. "The fact here in question is important. A mistake here takes too much from the force of the Scripture narrative; makes its parts conflict with each other; weakens our sympathy and interest in the whole. It ill befits the inspired pen to make so much ado about Moses never setting foot in the promised land—taken to Pisgah to see it, and die in sight of it, but never

entering; giving up his command, and, about to die, leaving it for Joshua to pass over and take possession—all this ado, we say, if already Moses and the whole host of Israel were encamped in the promised land; if already they had made two splendid conquests in that land. It spoils the very achievement of Joshua, on which the expositor is dilating, to tell us how the promised Canaan extended east of the Jordan. The great doctrinal figure is spoiled if we regard those children of the wilderness as entering upon their possession, or any part of it, without first crossing the Jordan. It makes a kind of half-way covenant—half-way in, before being in at all. Even the two tribes and a half that arranged to have their portion on the east, had themselves to cross the Jordan. That flood must be crossed. We do not want the doctrinal ideas herein suggested to be destroyed, or weakened in any way.

3. Folly of supposing “the plain” one of the parts intended by Abraham in his plan of separation.

It is this unsettled idea as to the true limits of the Canaan as promised that has ever led to a serious blunder as to the conduct of Lot in the separation. We remember the bitter reproaches cast upon him by Sunday-school expositors because he chose the plain. We remember all that homily suggested because “he lifted up his eyes.” (It means simply looking afar, as when God told Abraham to lift up *his* eyes.) They accused him of being “greedy, choosing the better part”—as if Sodom were a part,

and then as if Sodom would have suited Abraham and Sarah! Then they call Abraham generous for giving Lot the chance of taking from him—Sodom! (Here, we repeat, they talk just as if Abram already owned the land of Canaan.) But the censure of Lot becomes more palpably inconsistent, and we are made to see what a confused jumble the whole exposition is when we consider where Sodom was; namely, at a distance from Abraham's quarters at the time of the separation—and, not only so, but outside of the Canaan limits. We pretend to know, as already stated, what those limits were on the east, not the Jordan valley or "the plain," but the Jordan itself. As for "the plain," so far as any part of it was west of the river's bed, that part may have been in Canaan; so far as it was east of that bed, it was not in Canaan. Now on which side of the plain was Sodom? We say on the east side, for we believe the Bible and care not what traveler or antiquarian may say to the contrary. If Sodom had been on the Canaan side, we believe Lot would have escaped on that side, and have been at once in the arms of dear Abraham. We believe that Sodom was on the east side of the plain and outside of Canaan and, by consequence, such haste as was necessary in the case did not permit Lot or the angels to think of an escape across the no doubt already troubled bed of the river, and thence up the western acclivities. The heights eastward were their aim, because more readily accessible, Sodom being on the east side of the plain.

The real transaction was not strictly the "separation of Abraham and Lot," but the removal of Lot by divine providence from Canaan, thus early signifying that he was not to be a sharer with Abraham in the promise.

Supposing Sodom a part of Canaan, the expositor never opens his eyes to see how God used the quarrel between the herdsmen to accomplish a special purpose. It is not exactly the separation of Lot and Abram, it is taking Lot from Abram, removing him out of the land promised to Abram. Had Abram planned such an event he would have lowered himself in our estimation. He never turned Lot off, nor dreamed of such a thing. Yet Lot is off. There is a complete separation as to place, but in confidence, in love, and in an exalted opinion of each for the other, there is no evidence of any change whatever, but much to show that the two worthies remained identified in heart and feeling to the last.

Yes, God has removed Lot entirely out of the land—Lot who seemed indissolubly bound to Abram, his equal in goodness, and proving to be altogether his superior in aggressive virtue (see Second Peter, second chapter, compared with Gen. 19th chapter, in full), revered by him as righteous and so denominated by God Himself, is removed out of the land, is not to be a partaker with Abram in the promise, and this brought about by the strife between the herdsmen. But the expositors do not see this. They do not see that the bed of the Jordan was the eastern

boundary of Canaan. They suppose the land of Sodom was that "better part" of Canaan which Lot, if only he had had some manliness, would have left to Abram and Sarah, so that there, on the plains of Sodom, they might have passed their days, instead of lingering among the hills which were enshrined with the heavenly promise and already sacred with holy altars.

III.

REBECCA AND HER SONS.

I.—*Eliezer and Rebecca.*

The character of Eliezer and that of Rebecca, as they blend together in the sacred narrative, present a most charming picture of genuine confidence in God.

We see that Eliezer, in his mission to Padanaram, believed in God's providence, and fully committed himself to divine direction. A servant of Abraham, indeed, but in his mind it was all God's business; he wished no step taken, nor did he care to see anything accomplished, except as God should bring it about. Eliezer represents the best state of mind a mortal can possess in advancing any human enterprise. Thus he was brought into contact with Rebecca under circumstances which made it certain that she was chosen of God to be the person who, as the wife of Isaac, was to be identified with him in carrying out God's purpose of a separate family of the seed of Abraham. Thus Rebecca had her divine "call," we may say, as well as Abraham his.

From the minute narrative of events in connection with Rebecca, we see clearly that she at once understood God's purpose. It was this that prepared her, without a misgiving, to say, "I will go." A unit in

spirit with Eliezer, she joined him in the conviction that she must be the appointed handmaid of the Lord, to carry out His newly developed plan. The union to which she submitted was, indeed, a union with Isaac; but it originated in, and was based upon, strong religious sentiment—a union with God—union with Him in a specific purpose—that purpose being, as we should keep in mind, a separate nation.

As we should expect from this beginning, her life was marked at every step by coöperation with God.

II.—“*But Rebecca loved Jacob.*” *Gen. xxv. 28.*

Expositors pass very severe judgments upon the actions of Rebecca; so severe, indeed, as to forbid the idea of their ranking her among Scripture worthies. However this may be, in treating of any person's actions and character, it certainly becomes those who profess to speak and write under the influence of Christian principle to put a favorable construction upon actions where the facts in the case will allow it. This amenity, as it is the aim of this investigation to show, the expositors, in their preparations for the Sabbath-schools, have failed to extend to Rebecca—the woman, in many respects, preëminent in our list of Scripture worthies.

It is quite common for the expositor, first of all, to taunt Rebecca with the partiality it is claimed she showed to Jacob; and to make this the occasion of quite a homily on the trouble it made in the separate family. But the question we have to meet, as we ap-

proach the character of Rebecca, is not precisely that of partiality. Whilst it cannot be denied that the truly impartial parent treats one child different from another, according as the circumstances in the case may differ, still the question may arise, ought not the parent to love one the same as another? Now this is the question that confronts us as we approach the case of Rebecca and her children. Turning to the Scriptures we find that nothing in the original has seemed to require the use of the word "partial" in the translation. Bearing upon this subject, perhaps the following passage is as much in point as any: "And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his venison; but Rebecca loved Jacob." Gen. xxv. 28. The true inference is that she loved one child more than the other. Was it wrong to do so? In the light of Scripture no question of partiality concerns us. It is this question of love.

For a time a mother may be supposed to regard her children with equal love, and she may continue to so regard them through life. Yet there may come a time when those children prove so different in character—when they take to such different ways—when such different relations come to exist respectively between them and herself—that, without any shadow of wrong on her part, she may find the state of her mind and heart towards one quite different from what it is towards another. Thus he who would reproach a mother because her love all along through life does not continue the same to one child as to another supposes a line of goodness which, we think, God has never drawn.

III.—*Parental love affected by the conduct of children.*

The notable passage, "But Rebecca loved Jacob," declares the state of things between the parents and the children at a period when the latter had arrived at manhood—when time had developed in them two widely different characters, and two diverse courses of life. Esau, the skilful hunter, ranged the fields—this, his habit of life, presumably, almost always abroad—wild, reckless, caring little or naught for the company of his mother, but instead, already mingling quite freely with the corrupt people around, from whom, according to the divine will, the family were to keep separate. If reminded that the sanctity of his birthright forbade such license, he could speak derisively even of that, as of everything else distinctive in the chosen family. In this way, we apprehend, was evinced the profanity alluded to by the apostle. Thus we have reason to suppose that Esau, by his waywardness, had withdrawn himself almost wholly from family identification—entirely, perhaps, from the sympathy of a godly mother.

Now a son may, indeed, pursue a course ever so wanton, and even vicious, and yet treat his mother with such deference and fondness that she may be comparatively blind to his faults and love him still. But there is no reason to suppose there was any such offset to Esau's irregular life. On the other hand, there was, doubtless, a confirmed neglect of his mother's company, and a withering disregard for her feelings. Isaac, for aught we know, may have enjoyed

his repasts with Esau, may have been amused by his sallies of rude and jocular wit, but there is no indication that Rebecca relished any such pleasure, or in any way gave countenance to the wild life of a reckless son. And in this is there aught that we should construe to her disadvantage?

“But Rebecca loved Jacob.” No explanation, as in the case of Isaac’s preference for Esau, is given in the immediate connection; but we refer back to what is previously stated as to the difference between the two sons, in their character and manner of life, for the reason. If the love here spoken of was engendered by the good character that adhered to Jacob as he advanced into manhood, who could reproach her for it? Who can say it was wrong?

We admit that it was extraordinary. It was different from what we too often see in mothers of our time—we are sorry to say, even in Christian mothers. The wild, reckless boy is in some instances the mother’s idol. He may bring the family to disgrace—be a libertine—yet the fond mother will, somehow, even remain blind to his vices, and will love him (if love it really is) apparently the more. Rebecca was no mother of this sort. In our opinion, she loved the good boy. We propose here an honest inspection of Jacob’s character.

IV.—*Should Jacob’s name be interpreted to his disadvantage?*

We know well the girl of our period (and the moth-

er, too) is apt to commend the wild and reckless, rather than the plain and steady youth. And certain preachers, as if ruled by the same untoward fancy, would have us think better of Esau than of Jacob. Indeed, they take the earliest occasion to forestall the mind, hinting that there are certain bad doings of Jacob, some distance ahead, which young students of the Bible will be unprepared to know, unless, from the very start, all commendation of him is assiduously withheld. In fact, the young find every approach to an understanding of Jacob's true character effectually blockaded. His name, as they learn that it means supplanter, is made to answer this malign purpose. Undertake to say anything in favor of Jacob and how readily a Sabbath-school child will confront you. "His very name," he will tell you, "denotes a bad character." A notion so erroneous as this must be offensive, we should think, to every mind enlightened with gospel truth.

There are two parties, the elder and the younger. At the outset, the elder has prospective sway. But he is the wicked party. The state of things is to be changed, reversed—reversed by a conflict, a supplanting conflict—the younger supplanting the elder, indeed; but the main thing about it is that the good party is supplanting the bad; the righteous supplanting the wicked. There is moral grandeur in a conflict of this kind. Now the name, Jacob, given to one of the children, while commemorating an event which attended his birth, was the prophecy of a grand work in this line which he was to prosecute

and accomplish. When Jacob afterwards received a new name, it was no reflection upon the old one. The name Israel indicated a mode by which the supplanting, predicted in the name Jacob, was to become a success—the prophecy be fulfilled. Jacob, becoming Israel, was supplanter still; and God was still the supplanting God. That is what “God of Jacob” means. The name Israel, we say, showed how supplanting became a success—prayer prevailing in the case. This understood, the supplanter moved right into Canaan, all opposition melting away before him. Prevailing by prayer, he became fully established as his father’s successor. The term Israel became a watchword. Jacob is a type of a gospel church; it is a supplanting church. Israel is also a type, because it is a prevailing church—prevailing by prayer, just as Jacob did. Nobody, unless with the dull comprehension of an infidel, or the revengeful spirit of an Esau, should be expected to cast a slur on that younger brother on account of his name.

V.—*And Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents.*
Gen. xxv. 27.

The character Jacob bore when arrived at manhood accords with the name which had been given to him in its high commendatory sense. “And Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents.” Plain, in the sense commonly attached to the word, indicates a good character; for the plain man is very apt to be steady, honest, free from guile—a man who may be trusted.

But we take advantage of what even those critics who are severe on Jacob admit, namely, that the word in the Hebrew, represented in the translation by our word "plain," is the same which is applied to Noah where it is rendered "perfect"; the same, indeed, which is also applied to Job; and what those critics also admit is, that, but for certain subsequent acts of Jacob, it should undoubtedly be represented by that same term in describing him, or at least by some term of stronger commendation than the word plain. If perfect be too strong, take in its place two words, as "sincere and upright," making the sense of the word here the same as commentators give to it in other places.

Now, if this is just what the Bible says, who are we that we should wrest from Jacob the advantage of it? Who wants to drop any part of the Word or pervert it? If God calls David a man after His own heart, who shall dare expunge that commendation, or withhold the natural rendering, because he has learned that on a certain occasion David yielded to an egregious temptation? As already intimated, we propose to cling to the Divine Word and, as we advance, note things just as they transpire and are set before us by the inspired pen. And, from all that scholars tell us, that pen appears to say first, as much as it says anything, that Jacob, having arrived at manhood, was one of those rare characters called perfect, in the sense of sincere and upright; and that his mother loved him. It does not say that she was "partial" to him, or that she "idolized" him; but

she loved him. Was this wrong? We offer in reply only this consideration: If it was not wrong for Jacob to possess distinguished goodness it was not wrong for him to be loved for that goodness; and who had a better right to love him for such a cause than his godly mother?

VI.—*The error of expositors in making Rebecca chargeable with the future troubles of the family.*

And yet right here, with this passage, which only bespeaks the godly mother, more firm and exact, it must be admitted, in her moral sense than Isaac—with this passage, we say, “But Rebecca loved Jacob,” the expositors, able and learned men, commence their homilies on the great sin of partiality, and it is astonishing what a deplorable thing they make it—“the prolific source,” says one, “of most of the troubles which afterwards arose to disquiet the family of the patriarch.” The expositor should know, we think, that the first and chief disquietude distinctly named in the sacred narrative lay, not in the mother’s partiality for Jacob, but in Esau’s partiality for heathen women, among whom he had taken two wives; the immediate annoyance of which, great as it was, seemed as nothing compared with the darkness it was bringing over the fairest hopes of the separate family. Did parental partiality help on, or did it stay, the tide of disaster which was thus flowing in? If it be claimed that Isaac’s partiality was helping it

on, then certainly Rebecca's "partiality" (really a misnomer) counteracted Isaac's, and thus served to keep the family foundations from being swept away. It established Jacob as the successor to Isaac—made him the future head of the family; this, with no infinitesimal injustice to Esau.

This was real happiness for Rebecca—Isaac himself would not have it otherwise; and we know it was just what God wanted. Where, then, does it appear that the "distresses which embittered the remainder of their lives" were in consequence of parental partiality? Jacob leaves his father and mother for Padanaram; this is one of the "distresses." Here the expositors cry out, "How soon the mother reaps the whirlwind!" We are inclined to the opinion that Esau, though meditating murder just at that time, had a better understanding of the trouble in question than the commentators have. At any rate, it does not appear that he cast any censure upon his mother, or that he so much as thought of laying the family troubles to the charge of her partiality. He had an idea that the cause of trouble lay back at the time they were born, when, even on such an occasion, Jacob showed himself a "supplanter." We think he knew well enough where Jacob's advantage lay—in the Divine favor which he had from the start; and on account of this, probably it was, that he hated Jacob; just as Cain hated Abel, and Saul hated David. He could talk of Jacob's supplanting him, and, like the expositors, taunt him with his name; but he knew well enough God had used his own

acts in the matter of his being supplanted, or that he had, in fact, supplanted himself. And when he had nobody to blame but himself, he must take up the fight against God and resort to the terrible solace of meditating the murder of his brother.

Suppose Jacob did leave, and a long sorrow hung over his absence; we beg expositors to lay the blame where it belongs, upon Esau himself, and not upon his mother. She had not been the profane person to crush the tender heart of Esau into madness. Did ever godly parents have a son arrive at manhood and bear the character of Esau, as depicted by the pen of Moses, and referred to by the Apostle, and anybody be left in doubt as to who caused the family griefs? The expositor might as well lay the lamentation of the Bethlehem mothers to the charge of the Magi, or of Mary herself, as to make Rebecca responsible for the griefs in her family. The fact in the case is, there was a scapegrace in the family—that fornicator, that profane person who despised the distinctive character of his family as the chosen of God. And his mother had not made him such, as is common in our times, by idolizing him. If she had done so, she might have been responsible for the trouble he brought. But this was precisely not the condition of things that existed.

The expositors mete out their anathemas to the innocent; and, if they do not expressly commend the guilty, they show that their partiality is in that direction. They betray some disorder of conception similar to that which once induced a people to cry,

“Barabbas.” They do talk as if, back there before Rebecca planned the defeat of Esau, there was a chance for the select family to have entered upon a career of distinguished happiness, but that they failed of it all, and that nothing was left but to lament their misery because a wretch like Esau did not come in to be their head. They seem to think it would have been a blissful state of things from that time on if only the Lord, since He was the God of Abraham and Isaac, had been the God of Esau likewise.

VII.—*A gratuitous lament because “Isaac and Rebecca did not agree.” A shocking slander refuted.*

A certain writer bewails the sad life of that ancient pair, “Isaac and Rebecca,” because “they did not agree.” He even tells us “they were not married through and through,” because they clung to different opinions; one holding that the blessing belonged to Esau, the other that it should go to Jacob. Suppose they did disagree on a particular subject, what of it? If there was no quarrel, no altercation, no asperity, not a shadow of any such thing, we have only to admire them the more. Each appears to have duly borne with the other. As far as we can see, each left the other free to think and act according to his sense of duty; and this, in our view, is the best kind of agreement in the world. This, joined with a due amount of stern chastity and unyielding continence, answers very well for the demands of wedlock. It is

enough to say there is no trace or sign of a family jar between Isaac and Rebecca.

But were their opinions so very diverse? The readiness with which Isaac acquiesced in his own act, when he found he had done just the opposite of what he had set out to do and exactly what accorded with Rebecca's sense of right, shows that his disagreement with her was not very intense. Indeed, in view of all the circumstances in the case, one would not commit a very serious mistake should he intimate that Isaac had been cognizant of Rebecca's plot; or, rather, that it may have been just as much his plot as hers—that he himself had been seeking to bless Jacob, but wanted it done in such a way as not to bring upon himself Esau's wrath. Let us see what construction the facts in the case allow here. Isaac loved Esau, or, at least, did bear with him on account of the venison. This shade of meaning gives some chance for the inference that his general character was repulsive to him pretty much as it was to Rebecca. There is further evidence of agreement. Those two wives of Esau were a grief to his father and mother alike. They both saw and deplored the waywardness of his course; his utter disregard of their feelings on the subject which most concerned the family honor; what embarrassment and disgrace his conduct was bringing upon them as the separate family of God; the defeat, it would seem, of the Divine purpose in respect to them. (Gen. xxvi. 35.) And how it was to be helped was no doubt to both alike a dark problem.

From all we see in the sacred narrative, it does not appear to have entered the minds of either but that Isaac must move right on in pronouncing the blessing upon Esau. It looks very much as if Esther afterwards only copied from Rebecca. Seeking the escape of her people from the decree which had been instigated by Haman, she does not even hint to Ahasuerus any such resort as the reversing of that decree. No, the king's decree is to stand; but Esther is left free to devise and carry out any measure in her power to save her people. The decree was not abrogated, but she made the execution of it the means of accomplishing the very opposite of what was intended by it, just as the purpose of Isaac went right on; but Rebecca rallied her resources, planned and enacted an escape, so that purpose in its execution accomplished the opposite of what was intended. Rebecca may have been fully confident, not only that she would succeed, but that if she succeeded Isaac would only be glad of it; just as Esther knew she had the sympathy of Ahasuerus. Thus there is no necessity of accusing that ancient couple of any want of harmony; and it is only preposterous to say they were "not married through and through." Unsurpassed by any couple that ever lived, from first to last, no lapse from chastity ever befell them, no stain whatever adheres to their conjugal life.

VIII.—*Rebecca acting in concert with the divine purpose previously revealed to her.*

Rebecca, indeed, was a great exemplar. When the

crisis came, and Isaac made ready to confer the family blessing upon Esau, it seemed as if the death blow to the purpose of God was ready to fall. Before the children were born He had certified to Rebecca that the older son should serve the younger. What was the state of things when they were men grown and their father, it would seem, ready to die? Is Rebecca to be frowned on for regarding Esau in the same light in which he is presented by the Apostle? Revolving these things, she no doubt believed that God would somehow intervene as He did when He snatched Isaac from the altar; and here she appears to have left the matter to the last moment. But at that moment she acts. There was certainly enough, everyone must admit, to move her to action; especially when we consider that to her alone God had committed a knowledge of His purpose concerning her children. If it lay in her power to defeat an act in its nature subversive of God's plan, she believed in doing it.

Yet, right here many an expositor and preacher takes occasion to ignore the spirit of the gospel and assert that she should have been passive and have left God in His own way to establish Jacob—have “left God entirely to the execution of His own purposes,” they say. How strange it is that anyone, as he reads, does not see that God did execute His own purpose, and took His own way to do it, employing, as He did, the energetic service of Rebecca. Strange it is that so many, led on, we think, by the expositors, find here a most remarkable anomaly—perhaps the

only one of the kind among all achievements connected with God; a case in which God had a work which He fondly meant to achieve and have the credit of it all to Himself. But, first He knew, a woman had slyly taken the work in hand and done it herself; and ever since the Almighty has felt a chagrin over it!

What a fallacy! God makes to one of His children the disclosure of His purpose—and shall we complain if that child regards such a special disclosure as a command to help on in the accomplishment of that purpose? To so regard it and act accordingly evinces the enlightened Christian—the gospel hero. And this was Rebecca's course. Shall we, who live under the gospel dispensation, say it was wrong for Rebecca in that crisis to fall upon one of the distinctive laws of that dispensation (not so well understood at that time, it is true), namely, that God uses human activity in the accomplishment of His purposes? Wrong, was it, when she saw a part for her to do in the Divine affair at stake, that she turned to at once and did it? She thinks, and acts, too, just as if all depended on herself—and is not this the way God wants every soul of us to work for Him? And was this wrong? Who has told us that the man who feels his dependence upon God to feed him is expected to fold his arms, take no part in achieving a livelihood, and in such a way "leave God to the execution of His own purpose"?

The amount of it is, Rebecca had a mind to work, just as those descendants of hers had, who rebuilt Jerusalem. She did her work at just the time for it

to be availing—did it with dispatch—did it thoroughly—and never was success more complete and signal. The truth is, we have, in the Bible account of this transaction, just the way God does business—just His way of accomplishing a special object. He carries on a very large business by inspiring men and women to serve Him. When we complain of the way He established Jacob as successor of Isaac, we must remember if He had not done it the way He did, He probably would not have done it at all. He took His own way, anyhow.

IX.—*The great question: Was Rebecca in fault as to the measures she resorted to?*

Now comes the great question: God took His way—made use of Rebecca; but was she not exceedingly at fault in the means she employed? Here it is that the whole army of expositors cry out against her. For, though it was right for her to love Jacob, and to act in furtherance of the purpose revealed to her, how can she receive anything less than the unqualified censure of good people for precipitating her son into such an abyss of “deceit, falsehood and fraud”? Here, then, where Rebecca is most censured and, we may say, universally condemned, let us get as clear a view as possible of the truth in the case; for, if it is true that she led her son into sin, though the end she sought was ever so worthy, we ask for her no justification whatever. We do not seek for such conduct a favorable construction. What does

concern us and the cause of virtue is this: Whether the accusation is just. For Rebecca's sake, too, we ask, did Jacob lie? Did he practice deceit upon his father? Did he defraud his brother? If these questions admit of a negative answer, Rebecca stands acquitted of all fault.

I.—DID JACOB LIE?

There are two brothers, George and Stephen. An army is to be raised. Stephen is drafted. He has a family. He arranges with George to take his place. George goes as the man drafted—is accepted in the service as the man drafted. He reports himself as Stephen; can answer “I am Stephen.” It is no lie. That is his name, so far as the draft is concerned. No such person as George has ever been drafted. It is Stephen. Army law accepts George as the substitute of Stephen. This makes him, in his relation to the army, the veritable Stephen. He is Stephen by substitution.

Again, a man holds an office, say President of the United States. He is deposed. Another man steps forward and can say, “I am President of the United States.” Nobody considers it a lie. It is no lie. True, he was never chosen President by the people, nor was he born President, but he is so by substitution.

When Jacob said, I am Esau, it was truth, so far as the name Esau denoted the first-born, and represented the rights and privileges of the first-born.

Commentators do not hesitate to say of Esau, as

they do of Reuben, who came after him, that he had forfeited his birthright by his bad conduct. This can mean nothing less than that he had lost his place as first-born, that he had made that place vacant, that he no longer had any moral right to it. But, in addition, he had sold it. Thus he had neither moral nor legal right to the place as first-born. Under this state of things, there could be no first-born except by substitution. The sale could avail nothing except as the principle of substitution was to prevail. And who was there to be substituted, whether in a moral or legal point of view, but Jacob? Who but he could step forward and, as the blessing of the first-born was about to be conferred, rightfully and truthfully say, "I am Esau, thy first-born"? That was what the birthright, which he had purchased, meant; the right of the first-born, the right to stand in his place when the blessing was to be pronounced, and say "I am Esau." If it did not give him this right, it was meaningless, an empty nothing; for the blessing was to be conferred only on the first-born. The purchase embraced also everything Esau had that pertained to his identification as Esau. Jacob, therefore, had bought Esau's name, his clothes, his very hair. Jacob told no lie. He acted no lie. Whatever he said or acted, that he was by substitution.

This is the principle running through all law, civil and moral, to which no Christian should be blind, for it shines like a golden thread through all the gospel texture—the doctrine of substitution.

Whatever knowledge or learning we may acquire, without a correct understanding here we are very ignorant; whatever our position as teachers, we are but blind men leading the blind. We should not only understand this doctrine ourselves, but teach it to our children and see that they also understand it. There is no fitter place for teaching it than in the Sabbath-school. Has it been taught there? No better chance to begin this kind of instruction is found in the Bible than that which is offered in the case of Jacob. How sorrowfully the expositors, and, it is to be feared through them, the Sabbath-schools themselves have abused the chance.

Isaac should have had a quick perception of this feature in God's dealings, since his own blood did not flow on Moriah, God there providing a substitute. Rebecca, it seems, profited more by his experience than he did himself, being altogether more sagacious to see how God could effect His purpose and, in spite of Esau's default, maintain the honor of His chosen family by a process of substitution.

Ah, Rebecca, you that were led early to Sarah's tent, had the bereaved Abraham for your father, companion and friend. To you, rehearsing the dealings of God, he lived over the sublime events of the past, and thus all those events became incorporated with your own life. And in communion with him it was that you, too, foresaw the day wonderful for the grace displayed in the gospel of substitution through Christ Jesus. How is it that Gentiles come in, declaring that they are God's Israel? And is this a

lie? How does any poor sinner escape his doom except through an ever-memorable substitute? Certainly we should use the case of Jacob to unfold this doctrine to the child—not to tell him that Jacob lied.

II.—DID JACOB DECEIVE HIS FATHER?

Here let it be granted that Isaac *supposed* he was conferring the blessing upon the one *to whom it rightfully belonged*. It turned out that he really did this. Jacob, following his mother's directions, had only assisted his father in getting at the right person. As stated in a former article, Isaac, we believe, became satisfied that the rightful son had received the blessing. The just cause of complaint on his side was, not that he had been deceived, but that he did not himself sooner see a release from the family dilemma in a process of substitution.

And still does any one say, "Isaac was deceived; he supposed he was blessing one person when it was not that person"? Now mark—if just at that time perfect sight had been given him what would Isaac have seen? He would have seen just this—Jacob standing before him the substitute of Esau: the venison prepared for him, the hair on his wrists and neck, the scent of his garments, all declaring only what was the fact in the case—just what Jacob asserted, "I am Esau, thy first-born." All that he said and did declared him very Esau by substitution. If therefore we discover in the transaction only a strict adherence to truth and righteousness, we do not think

it fair to accuse Jacob of deceiving his father.

III.—DID JACOB DEFRAUD ESAU?

This question may be considered as already answered; and yet so commonly the expositors speak of "Jacob's fraud" as a fact accepted by all Christian people, "Jacob's fraud," indeed, being upon almost everyone's lips, that we feel it enjoined on us to give the question further consideration. In the matter of receiving the blessing, he could not have defrauded Esau. He thereby received nothing that belonged to Esau. Esau had sold his right here to Jacob. Besides, if he had not sold it, he had forfeited it twice over. He should be considered entirely out of question here, as much so as if he were dead. There was nothing of Esau's that Jacob ever became possessed of through that blessing.

But that very purchase, it is maintained even from the pulpit, was a swindle. Wherein, we ask? Was it not a straight bargain? "No," we are told; "he did not pay for the birthright anything what it was worth—it was a prodigious swindle." Here is a fallacy. Honesty does not require that a man pay for everything that he receives just what it is worth to him. If a man gets his bones broken, he never thinks of paying the surgeon what it is worth to him to have his bones put to rights. You may have a tract of marshy land worth nothing to you, and you may offer it to me for a mule, and if I take it and make a valuable rice field of it, am I a swindler?

Now, the birthright could be of no value to Esau,

for it was only a forfeited birthright that he had. Besides, it was not possible for a sensual nature like his to value it. Indeed, his profanity lay, presumably, in the boast that it was worthless. Profanity has some reference to speech—speech in regard to sacred things. What were the sacred things in Esau's case but the family promises? He was in the habit of speaking derisively of these and of the character of the family as chosen of God. He cared only for present and sensual gratification. He wanted no restraint put on his minglings with the Canaanites; he saw in the birthright no charm whatever. It only chafed upon his recreant propensities; and his speech, repeated, no doubt, over and over, must have been to the effect that, as for the birthright, it was nonsense to pay any respect to it—it was valueless. Now, when Jacob took this opportunity to say, "Sell me thy birthright," it was only taking him at his word—sell it for this pottage. Esau only abided by his habitual profanity in accepting the proposal and, with an oath, binding the sale. Jacob sought only what Esau despised. But for a legal force he might have said, "Give me thy birthright;" then, as now, probably it was understood that something must be named as a consideration, in order to make a legal transfer of interests. It is under all these considerations, so manifestly to the contrary, that we hear it ringing on every side from pious lips how Jacob "defrauded Esau!"

Thus, by a careful inspection of all the circumstances, we cannot fail to see that Esau, as might well

be expected from his habitual profanity, turns out to be the fraudulent party. Yes, when he came before his father and, with the view of receiving a birthright blessing, declared "I am Esau," that was a most wanton and ignoble attempt at robbery. We have long been tired of hearing Jacob derided by educated Christians as "unscrupulous and dishonest." That was Esau's character. Jacob was thoroughly honest. Children and all people should understand this. Indeed, the sacred narrative is so plain no one would think of anything else but for commentators and preachers descanting from time to time on "Jacob's fraud."

X.—*The pottage bargain interpreted by the way it was complied with.*

The pottage transaction admits of a construction which presents Jacob in the light of making what Esau must have considered a generous offer for his birthright interest. We arrive at that construction by considering that sometimes a contract is fully understood by outside parties only as they see how it is fulfilled. A prophecy may be quite dim until the fulfilment comes and makes it plain. So it may be with a bargain.

Let us consider, then, how Jacob appears to have complied with the terms of his purchase. Surveying carefully the line of subsequent events, we fail to discover on the part of Jacob, or his mother, the least indication that they expected any share of the worldly

patrimony to fall to him. Everything proceeds as if both he and his mother had no other thought than that, as for this world's goods, Jacob was to shift for himself. Nor was there ever any repining over this condition of things. From all that worldly substance of his father's he never received anything—he never sought anything. When, after that long sojourn in Padanaram, he returned, it was not to rescue to himself any part of his father's goods; but, on the other hand, to pour from his own earnings treasure upon treasure into the lap of Esau.

Thus all subsequent events tend to the conclusion that the bargain *de facto* was about thus: Esau to take the objects of worldly desire and present gratification, represented by the pottage; Jacob to have the promised good, never to be enjoyed by himself, indeed, but by his family in centuries to come, represented by the birthright.

Accordingly, in the history of the Old Testament worthies, there are few spectacles of moral grandeur presented that surpass the scene when Jacob, turning his back upon present good and every hope of a worldly inheritance, leaves his parents with only a staff in his hand and the promise of God made to his fathers hid in his heart. Alone that first night, sleeping beneath the open sky, his pillow a stone, he received in his sleep the most memorable tokens of regard from his complacent Father in heaven.

But, blind to this Scriptural representation, what do our preachers and expositors present to our view? The picture of a "guilty criminal" "fleeing from

justice" (as if Esau only meditated a just act!), "shunning human habitations," "making his bed as an outcast," the "miserable victim of an accusing conscience." Then they allow—at least, some of them—that a sense of sin drove him to God in penitence, and that on that night he became a converted man! A more shallow interpretation of Scripture was never made by learned or unlearned, friend or foe to the truth.

It is not an interpretation. It is the worthless vagary of a disordered imagination. And it is only under the influence of such an imagination that expositors go on intimating at every conceivable opportunity, throughout the entire life of Jacob, how he must have been perpetually reminded of his "fraud upon Esau."

It is a significant fact, that does not augur very well for the morals of the expositors themselves, that, on coming to the feuds and factions of the patriarchal family, they do not so much as advert to a plurality of wives and subwives as the source of them—no, indeed!—but, as if that was all right enough, they refer those special troubles away back to that signal "treachery upon Esau"!

There is another fact that must be noticed in this connection, and incontrovertible it is. If Jacob did sin in the matter of the birthright, and if God did hold him answerable for any fault therein, let no one presume to find, in all the history given of him with such precision by inspiration, the least trace of evidence that he was ever penitent for it, or that God,

directly or indirectly, sought from him any confession. Look for Jacob's repentance for his treatment of Esau, or God's forgiveness? You might as well look for the same in the case of Joseph, in view of his distinguished continence; or in the case of Moses, because he chose affliction with the people of God.

XI.—*The fidelity of Rebecca to the Abrahamic family.*

We started out with the plea that a favorable construction should be put upon one's actions where the facts in the case will allow it. In the search whether the application of this rule to Rebecca would turn to her advantage, we find that the facts in her case, justly considered, not only permit, but compel a favorable interpretation; and, beyond this, such an interpretation, indeed, as should exalt her in the estimation of all mankind.

Have expositors forgotten the vision that glided on their view as they first saw Rebecca at the well? Can they forget the lustrous traits of her character as disclosed by the sacred pen when it first introduced her to their acquaintance?—a creature, born seemingly to strong religious sentiment, quick to recognize the Divine hand and follow where it leads, be the consequences what they may—chosen of God to be identified with Him in His grand scheme of a separate nation. How firm her trust, how fixed her purpose, how prompt her action; nothing by halves, no wavering, no misgiving. Her decision made, the

execution was sure and immediate. That very morning she starts out upon the new line of life which she knows God has marked out for her. Such we see her as she was led by Isaac into his mother Sarah's tent.

We consider that her subsequent life, though beset with trials, was a grand fulfilment of what her character, as at first presented, so beautifully augured.

Uniform and symmetrical from beginning to end, never once blemished by any particle of that family license which was so prevalent in that age, and which invaded even the tents of Abraham, without a lapse into error that any Bible reader should bemoan, what she was at the start she continued to be to the last—hers a life of complete identification with God in all His purposes as made known to her. Unsurpassed in this respect, her record will remain to adorn the annals of all time—the illustrious successor of Sarah in the line of female worthies; though a woman, the peer of Abraham himself.

XII.—*Jacob in Haran. The “twenty-years” fallacy.*

We notice that in Sunday-school literature the idea is conveyed that Jacob remained in Haran only twenty years. Nor is this altogether strange, for the same idea prevails in the most noted commentaries. But an erroneous view like this, though seemingly trifling, throws the Scripture narrative into confusion.

Whether the time was twenty years, or twice that number, depends very much upon the interpretation

we give to Gen. xxxi. 41: "Thus have I been twenty years in thy house." Here, what precedes evidently shows what twenty years are meant; namely, the twenty years he has been speaking of, introduced back in verse 38. "This twenty years have I been with thee," having charge of Laban's stock and caring for it, with some share of the increase stipulated as pay; carrying on a kind of partnership, outside, probably, of the care of his own flocks and herds, and in this way becoming rich. Having fully set forth his self-denying care for Laban's interests, he closes, verse 41, "Thus have I been for twenty years in thy house." This really ends the paragraph, though in the middle of a verse. The record continues, "I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters." Now it cannot be that these fourteen years are a part of the twenty he had been giving account of. He was not making a business of caring for Laban's interests and sharing the increase for pay. There, too, were the six years he serves, taking pay in cattle. Now, we must bear in mind these fourteen years and the six make the full twenty years, the whole period of time which commentators claim for Jacob to have been in Haran. It is here obvious that if Jacob was in Haran only twenty years, the cattle which he received in pay for the last six years must have constituted the whole stock he had when he left Haran. But it stands to reason that he needed the full additional twenty years to acquire the amount of stock with which he moved out of Haran, which must have been quite immense, judging from

the droves sent forward to Esau. We here introduce the catalogue: 220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 camels with their colts, 50 cows and 10 bulls, 20 she asses and 10 foals. Now it would be extravagant to suppose that the pay for the six years' service amounted to even what was here sent forward to Esau, which no one has ever imagined to have been more than a tenth of the whole.*

This one view of the subject requires the intrepertation we have given—that Jacob, in his address to Laban, is calling to mind two different twenties in time; one, the period during which he acquired his wealth, the other, during which he had served, fourteen years for Rachal and Leah, and six for cattle.

Another advantage in the twice twenty years theory lies in this, that it saves us from supposing Dinah only an infant and Joseph unborn when Jacob undertook his return to Canaan. For under the twenty-year theory, if we suppose Dinah a year old when the removal commenced, it gives to Leah only twelve years after her nuptials, a part of this time being barren, to bear seven children, none of them twins. And Dinah being the last, we do not favor the interpretation that obliges us to think she was a babe, or only two or three years old, at most, when she commenced her residence in Canaan and became the object of fatal attraction to Sheshem.

* If it is not right here that Jacob fulfilled his vow made at Bethel, we have no knowledge of its ever being fulfilled at all. On the supposition it was here fulfilled, we know precisely the amount of substance with which Jacob moved out of Haran. It was just ten times what he sent forward to Esau.

It is owing to the twenty-year theory that Sunday-school expositors startle the young by telling them that Jacob was seventy-seven years old when he first saw Rachel at the well. All admit that he was ninety-seven when he left Haran. If he, then, was only twenty years in Haran, he was, as they tell us, seventy-seven when he first arrived there. But, adopting the forty-year theory, we can boldly affirm he was only fifty-seven when, with staff in hand, he set out for Haran and, having arrived there, first saw Rachel at the well.

IV.

THE RETURN OF JACOB FROM MESOPOTAMIA.

INTRODUCTORY.

If we have found deep meaning in the early years of Jacob when his life was blended, so to speak, with that of his mother; if our sympathy is touched as we see him turning his back upon the endearments of home and his father's material wealth, making his way on foot and alone, cheered only by the testimony of God's favor; if we have found ourselves enthusiastically following out the vicissitudes of his fortune in building up a family and acquiring independence during forty years in Haran; is it quite wonderful if, after all this, we shall find the period which embraces his return from Haran to Canaan still more interesting and instructive?

It is right here that God may be said to especially reveal Himself in Jacob. It is in this journey with his family and substance out of Haran into Canaan—although a brief period of time, only twenty days perhaps, or thirty at most—that we see the character of Jacob in its true light and find ourselves most impressed with his high moral and intellectual worth. Here we discover Rachel and Leah also rising in our

estimation and showing themselves fully allied with the Abrahamic family.

I.—*The command to return connected with the promise at Bethel.*

It was when Jacob's second twenty years in Haran drew to a close that this period of his removal back to Canaan commenced. Though separated from Bethel by forty years in time, it has a close connection with the memorable scene in the life of Jacob which made that place remarkable. How wonderful that God should speak to a mortal as he did to Jacob, in a vision in his sleep, as he lay there pillowed upon stones! "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed: and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

II.—*Jacob in council with Rachel and Leah.*

And now behold this man after forty years of strange experiences in Haran. The injustice of Laban and the jealousy of his sons becoming past

endurance, Jacob, in the midst of his perplexity, hears again the complacent voice of God: "Return unto the land of thy fathers and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee." This voice comes to him when he is away in the field—he cannot leave his flock. But what is the first thing he does? Only a person of the most exquisite sense as to what constitutes genuine nobility of character in the family head would be apt to give the right answer. How beautifully the record continues: "And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flocks." We here see that they are his partners, his counselors in the most important decisions; he must have them in full agreement with him; they must be identified with him; indeed this movement must be their affair as well as his. In most of the states of our republic there is a law to the effect that a man cannot deed away his home without his wife's signature. That law finds its commendation right here in Jacob. He receives God's direction, but he makes compliance with it Rachel's and Leah's affair as well as his own. He gives them the opportunity of showing their identification with him in this all-important matter of obedience to God, whereby they are to abandon their father and native country.

It is highly interesting to contemplate the conference held there in the field. How careful Jacob is that Rachel and Leah have a precise understanding of the situation! "I see your father's countenance, that it is not towards me as before." This was a strong point. How could he live with a man, join

him in social and business relations, yet all the while conscious of his jealousy and ill will—a man that was troubled because his own daughters and their husband were prosperous,—prosperous most certainly by God's doing? "As ye know," he says, "I have served your father with all my power. And now the angel of the Lord has appeared unto me, saying, 'I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out of this land and return unto the land of thy kindred.'" Here the women enter more fully into the case, and show more glaringly their father's injustice than Jacob does, as if conscious that the present estrangement of their father forbids the expectation of any generous consideration for them in the future. And as for the past, though having submitted to the depraved custom of their time, they show a full comprehension of its turpitude and assert the natural right of a daughter to participate in the earnings of her affianced husband, instead of their being grasped by her father. Notice, whilst Jacob has referred to Laban's unfair deal with him in recent years, Rachel and Leah go back of all that to his early cruelty to them. Instead of having received any dowry "have we not been counted as strangers, for he hath sold us and hath devoured all our money," which, as well paraphrased by an able commentator, is as much as to say: "Instead of dealing with us as daughters, bestowing on us honorable dowries, he bargained us away like slaves, and applied the proceeds to his own

use." And they end with perhaps as wise a counsel as ever fell from human lips: "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee do it." We count Solomon wise, but, of all he ever wrote, what so comprehensive in wisdom as the conclusion these women arrived at in their advice to Jacob?

III.—*How the journey commences. Arrival in Mount Gilead in ten days, explained.*

"Then Jacob rose up and set his sons and his wives upon camels; and he carried away all his cattle and all his goods." (Gen. xxxi. 17.) Here, in the first place, we may learn something valuable in exegesis. The inspired pen is wonderful in brevity, and we must not deceive ourselves into an inconsistency by allowing too little time to intervene between two events which, in the record, follow close upon each other. Where it says, "Then Jacob rose up and set his sons and his wives upon camels," this must have been some time after the deliberation with the two women; for, in only ten days after he started the women and children on the camels, they, with all his enormous droves of cattle, some young and tender-footed, had arrived at Gilead, over three hundred miles from Haran. Now, the cattle, with the young and tender-footed, could not possibly have gotten over this distance in so few days. We are left to suppose that Jacob, immediately after that council held with the women, commenced secretly dispatching droves, one after another, by different routes.

But Jacob himself, with the family proper, lingered behind and set out only in time to overtake, in ten days, the servants with their droves at Gilead. If the distance was three hundred and sixty miles, it was traveling thirty-six miles a day. We may think it fast traveling, but it was easily done on camels. Of course, Laban's troop traveled faster and overtook Jacob by making fifty miles a day.

IV.—*Overtaken by Laban. Trouble ended by a covenant of peace. Jacob met by angels as he moves on. Mahanaim.*

Having arrived in Mount Gilead, Jacob and his family must have felt a happy relief from their apprehension of trouble in the way of being molested by Laban, when their feeling of safety was suddenly checked by the appearance of a party in hot pursuit of them—Laban's adherents, himself at the head of them; the fact of his having followed them so far and perseveringly making certain his purpose to capture the droves of cattle, the men servants and women servants, and take them back to Haran; possibly Jacob himself, and his family also, to be forced back into a hopeless servitude. And what made the difficulties of the occasion more trying was Laban's bringing Jacob to account for the stolen images; this matter was made more desperate when Jacob, in answer to the charge, says: "With whomsoever the images are found let him not live." Most fortunately, owing to Rachel's adroitness, the images were not found;

whereupon Jacob takes occasion to set before Laban the hardship he has endured in caring for his interests: "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." And what had he received from Laban in turn, but to be treated as an enemy? He ended by telling Laban how, "except the Lord had interposed, he would have been sent away empty." Here note the fact: The case between the two was so manifestly as Jacob stated that Laban did not presume to deny a word he said, or utter aught in palliation.

It is supposed by many that, in the matter of the rods, Jacob played a trick on Laban. Not so. The stipulation for Jacob to have all the speckled was virtually an arrangement for him to have nothing, unless God's blessing upon his ingenuity could secure a streaked increase. Such increase resulted, but the truth of the matter was precisely as Jacob expressed to Rachel and Leah. "God took away the cattle of your father and gave them to me."

After the bold and faithful statement of the case by Jacob, Laban seems to have known no other way of answering but by proposing a covenant to which Jacob conceded by saying, "Gather stones": and of the stones they made a heap to be witness between them, neither party to pass by it to molest the other. In conclusion, Jacob offered sacrifices and made a feast at which both parties tarried for most of the night. And early in the morning Laban kissed his sons and his daughters, and departed and returned

unto his place. And how grateful to Rachel and Leah must have been this relief from trouble, and, indeed, this final release from jealous brothers and an estranged father, their consolation being a complete identity with Jacob, joining him and firmly standing with him on the highest moral platform ever reared: "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do it."

Here we can hardly refrain from tears of sympathy for the family as we think how happy they were; for, as they went on, the angels of God met them, and Jacob said, "This is God's host." He no doubt recognized them as the same he had seen at Bethel, when, forty years before, God had graciously promised his return. Oh, what a time of gladness! It is not recorded that anything was said by the angelic host, but their presence alone was a renewal of the promise at Bethel that God would bring him again to that land. The place thus noted by the presence of angels Jacob called Mahanaim—memorable, indeed! for probably the family of Jacob was never happier than at this time.

V.—*About to pass through Seir, Jacob sends messengers to Esau. His alarm at the report brought back.*

How truly was the life of Jacob only a series of strange vicissitudes!—but the darkest hour was just before him. Esau, in the enlargement of his possessions, was at this time dwelling in Seir, and through a portion of this territory it was necessary, it seems,

for Jacob to pass. Skilled in human nature and with his usual sense of propriety, Jacob sends messengers before him to Esau. The main thing was to let his brother know how, by remaining in Haran as he had, he was now returning with immense flocks and herds, men servants and women servants. This was a very sensible and clear-sighted message. We learn from it what was the precise ground of Esau's hate. He thought the blessing which had been conferred upon Jacob would leave him without the paternal wealth. It was for this reason he hated Jacob and meditated on taking his life. With this understanding of the trouble, Jacob had the discretion to send messengers to Esau to let him know of the abundance with which he was returning from Haran. Certainly upon knowing this he would dismiss all thought of his returning to claim what he had no need of—any part of his father's estate. No, Jacob could not think of anything so base as that Esau, while he was enjoying his father's wealth, the whole of it, and himself none of it, would take in hand to wrest from him what he had acquired in his long absence. Thus we can only imagine his consternation when the messengers returned, saying: "We came to thy brother Esau, and moreover he cometh to meet thee with four hundred men with him."

And the record continues: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid." If ever mortal had good reason to be afraid it was Jacob at this time, for plainly Esau, after forty years, had not outgrown that murderous hate

which had fired his brutal heart with the resolve to kill him. He was utterly defenseless against any hostile attack; and, to human view, there was no escape from falling, himself, his family, and all his substance, into fiendish hands. And here, where the patriarchal family should receive the sympathy of all generous minds, it seems only in line with the cruelty of Esau that any Christian commentator should intimate that Jacob, under these circumstances, was "greatly afraid" because he was here "brought to face an old wrong that he had done Esau.'

VI.—*Preparing for the worst, whilst his reliance is God's promise, he prays.*

"Jacob was greatly afraid." He was left, we would say, with no resort. We can conceive how his first thought may have been for his family to start a return on camels towards Haran. This would be to overtake Laban and run the hazard of making him their protector, whilst the whole wealth of cattle and servants would fall into the hands of Esau. But no such course as this could Jacob reconcile with the recent direction of God for him to return to Canaan. And here his sagacious mind fell upon a plan by which, though it would strip him of the half of his substance, would leave a chance of saving his family and the part remaining. He divided the people, flocks and herds, and the camels into two bands, these moving forward, it may be presumed, one con-

siderably in advance of the other so that, the one being attacked, the other might escape.

But this was by no means the whole of Jacob's resort. He prays—and what a prayer it was! It should put to shame the commentators who so readily attribute his fears to a sense of any wrong he had done to Esau. He acknowledges God's great goodness to him, for he was not worthy of the least of all his mercies. To the God who had said, "Return unto thy country and thy kindred," he cries, "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him lest he will come and smite me and the mother with the children." We see here that Jacob had no thought of deliverance by backing out of his journey. We see here Jacob's consciousness of the extremity to which Esau's barbarity might lead—not only to his own death, but to the extermination of his offspring. His reliance was upon God to save him in the emergency to which his obedience to God had brought him, not an old wrong to Esau. For anyone to discover, in this prayer, any evidence whatever of acknowledgment to God of a wrong done to Esau, must weaken his claim to respect as an interpreter of the Word. The way the prayer closes shows how far Jacob is from basing his expectation of help upon any confession of wrong to Esau. "For thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," having reference, no doubt, to the words, "I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest" (Gen. xxxii. 12.)

VII.—*He plans another mode of effort, combatting evil with good. The presents viewed in connection with his vow.*

Thus Jacob made the wisest provision for the worst. But, whilst they lodged there that night, he thinks out another scheme of effort to be put in execution at the same time that he forms his attendants and their charge into two bands. He is going to try the effect of combatting evil with good—the very thing enjoined by Christ centuries afterwards. No doubt it was as they were forming into the two bands that he took of that which came to hand a present for Esau. Nor was this proceeding strange. At the time God said at Bethel, “I will be with thee,” Jacob himself had made a vow in these words: “If God be with me so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, . . . and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.” Now he had come to the very confines of the territory which afterwards fell to his posterity. And here, as he had called upon God to fulfil His promise, how opportune it was to see how God wanted the tenth right there, to use in melting the heart of Esau. The offering is prepared, and without knowing what the result would be these two plans are acted on: The presents to move in the advance; if they should not appease Esau, as he would meet them, then the supposition would be that, in capturing the first band, some time would be occupied in disposing of it, or that it would be

taken as the whole of Jacob's property, so that the other band, with the family proper, would escape, at least, immediate destruction.

We see how Jacob made requisition on all the wisdom he had, and all the effort of which he was capable, and we must not forget how this was necessary in order to make his prayer of reliance upon God for deliverance consistent. God answers prayer by giving success to our labor in attainment of what we pray for. We have noticed that, in this case of Jacob, the circumstances were such that seemingly nothing could be done. And yet how much, how very much, Jacob did, with the greatest deliberation, yet in the briefest time!

VIII.—*Victory antedated by a contest at Peniel
when Jacob, alone with God, obtained
His pledge of safety.*

But we have not told it all. It is one of the sublimest spectacles of human warfare, the opposing parties getting into position:—on the one hand, the two bands with all their live stock moving on, one considerably in advance of the other, these preceded by the droves on droves of presents;—to meet, on the other hand, an advancing enemy, the unrelenting Esau with his four hundred men prepared to capture Jacob and take possession of all he had. As the last thing in the scene before us, when the droves and bands had been started forward, it is said of Jacob, “He rose up that night and took his two wives and his

two women servants and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them and sent them over the brook and sent over that he had" (all that he had was passed over).

It was pushing forward in the matter of returning to Canaan, as God had directed, though seemingly in the face of inevitable ruin. But he does not do this without the rally of all his wisdom and the exercise of every effort; as if an escape was possible by human means. And having done this, what is said of him? "And Jacob was left alone: and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of day." Here, really, the battle was fought, the victory won, Esau conquered. Here Jacob acquired his new name. Here he stands as representative of what was to come in the church militant. Where was success to lie? In taking God at His word; holding God to His pledge. We see a man meeting the greatest obstacles, utter ruin staring him in the face, and yet never hesitating one moment to follow God's direction; then holding God to His promise for success. Thus Jacob prevailed and received the new name of Israel. But all this is spoiled when the commentator speaks of his wrestling with God for the forgiveness of his sin against Esau. There is nothing in the text or its connection that sanctions, or even hints at such a thought. The struggle that night at Peniel was plainly a struggle with God—holding Him to His promise, claiming His intervention in the terrible emergency, because he had come into it by doing just what God had directed; Rachel and Leah stand-

ing with Him on that same moral platform, "doing whatsoever God has said unto thee." It seems that God is never more pleased with mortals than when they hold Him to His word. It is right here that He tries men, tries their faith by bringing them into circumstances where, seemingly, God has deserted them.

A Sunday-school expositor has spoken of this occasion at Peniel as the time of Jacob's conversion. "There he was made a new man,"—but by no means in the sense supposed. He had prevailed with God, obtained the blessing sought, making a great change; not as to any trouble of conscience, but a change from a state of terror, from threatening calamity to one of perfect relief under a feeling of complete safety.

IX.—*The battle between the brothers described.
Jacob as a preëxistent gospel victor
reënters the Promised Land.*

The same revengeful Esau with his four hundred men was just upon him, but every particle of fear was gone, strengthened and armed, as he was, in the consciousness of God's standing by his side so that Esau could not harm him. In this condition, how serenely he moves on, every now and then bowing himself to the ground, worshiping God. When, lo! Esau is in sight. He comes, his four hundred men with him. Behold the battle, the most remarkable ever fought! "And Esau ran to meet him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept. And

he looked around and saw the women and the children, and said, who are these with thee? And Jacob said, the children which God hath graciously given thy servant. Then the handmaidens came near and bowed themselves. And Leah also, with her children; came near and bowed themselves; and after came Joseph near and Rachel and they bowed themselves. And he said what meanest thou by all the droves that I met? And Jacob said those are to find grace in the sight of my Lord. And Esau said I have enough, my brother, keep that thou hast unto thyself." What a wonder here! Esau is the new man, conquered, converted, won by love! Yes, Jacob is prevailer indeed, and yet supplanter still; supplanting hate with love; a preëxistent gospel worker on the high plane of Christian heroism.

It is here seen that to speak of the presents as due to Esau and intended to heal a past wrong, spoils one of the best records of a much higher virtue than making amends. When we think of the emphasis our Lord placed upon his direction of returning good for evil, we ought not to forget that there was an illustrious example of that virtue far back in the past, and its trial a brilliant success, when Jacob, in the imminent peril of his family and substance, made the revengeful Esau his friend.

Thus we are here led to contemplate one of the grandest of moral truths—how that the glory of victory lies, not in the overthrow or destruction of a most dangerous enemy, but in the grandest of all exploits, seizing the time of special conflict and making

it the opportunity of transforming an implacable enemy into a lifelong friend.

Behold the conclusion of the patriarch's journey! He passes on secure and happy in his family and possessions. He makes his return into Caanan, the fulfilment of God's promise shining in a halo of glory around him. And what of Esau and his four hundred men? Under the magic force of that one prevailing prayer they become a wall of defense to protect the younger brother in the primogeniture rights which had fallen to him when he stood before his father and said, as he was authorized to say by the purchase he had made, "I am Esau, thy first-born."

V.

JOSEPH AND THE MORALIZERS.

I do not know that any expositor has intimated that Cain was probably noble and high-minded, though at times impetuous; or that anyone has ever insinuated that Abel very possibly made himself unnecessarily offensive to his less fortunate brother in that matter of an appropriate sacrifice. But certain it is, this would not be much more inconsistent than the reflections which have been virtually cast upon the doings of Joseph and his father, by way of accounting for the cruelty of his brothers. A noted interpreter of the Bible tells of the father's mistake in making for the lad that variegated coat; for this, he says, instigated hatred, and he moralizes in these words: "It is extremely dangerous, indeed actually criminal, for parents to show partiality to any of their children." And what next? "Joseph incurred the hatred of his brothers by carrying to his father a report of their evil doings." And the moralizing continues: "This tale-bearing is to be severely condemned." Then there were those dreams. "Why tell such dreams to his brothers?" "How lacking in modesty, how injudicious it was!"

Now these references to what Jacob did and what Joseph had done are only what we would expect from

an advocate employed to clear the guilty brothers, an advocate who sees the necessity of hunting up some provocation or other where absolutely there is none, It is no place here for a commentator to moralize on the sin of favoritism. The Scripture is, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age"—born at last, too, of Rachel, his real wife. But she had died, and, unlike those older brothers, the tender Joseph had no mother. Now the truth is, those older brothers, had they possessed only a spark of virtue, would have rejoiced to see what happiness had come to their father in Joseph. But, taken as a whole, they were without virtue. Under the baneful influence of Simeon and Levi they had become apparently consolidated in wickedness—witness their savage treachery and remorseless vengeance upon the Shechemites. The father could have no pleasure in those children, every thought of them filling his breast with terror, mortification and shame. There was left to him no encouragement for hope, save in Joseph. And what a mercy it was that Joseph, born into the worst contact since those older brothers, his natural companions were already inuring themselves to vice and conspiring in courses of cruelty, what a mercy that he was not beguiled by their arts! How wonderful that he gave no countenance to the wrongs they perpetrated! What a child he was! How firm he stood for virtue and truth! And when he saw wrong-doing he regarded it as his business to make it known to his father. Right here is seen the distinctive traits of character which gave renown to his after life. He appears to

have been the only one the father could trust. And was it wrong for the father to love Joseph? There was no concealment in these matters. Joseph was above concealing his fidelity to his father, nor was it anything to be concealed that, under the circumstances, the father loved Joseph more than the rest of his sons. So far as the coat denoted the father's love and testified to Joseph's fidelity, it should be regarded as a needed reproof to the older brothers, a standing testimony, applauding virtue and condemning vice, a sermon stereotyped and ever ready to admonish the recreant brothers of their sins. Why, then, should an eminent Hebrew scholar make this an occasion to say, "Telling evil reports, unless in the interest of friendship, is to be severely condemned" —a poor maxim, thus worded. If he means, "unless for the family good, or the good of society, or the protection of an innocent party," we should call it correct. And on what other ground than this, we ask, had the innocent Joseph acted? What expositor has any reason to doubt that it was for the good of the family and the purity of shepherd life around them, that Joseph made known to his father what the older sons were doing? And further, another general truth is here in place. For one to be a witness of criminal wrong and not expose it, makes him virtually a participator in the wrong. It is at least siding with the guilty. Thus, to talk about the "sin of favoritism" in the matter of that coat made for Joseph, or of his report of vile doings, is to put virtue and vice, patriotism and treason, on the same moral footing.

But the expositors complain more of Joseph's *tongue* than of his coat. They see, indeed, no harm in his dreams; but that tongue, which has been hard on evil deeds of others, must tell also what dreams he has had. Here we do not ask for Joseph any such extenuation as the expositor chooses to make, that, "however lacking in modesty and discretion, it was the work of a child, innocent and with no malice." The course pursued by Joseph was consistent with a sound mind in the full understanding of moral law and the knowledge of God. Such was the nature of the dreams that they were obliged to be regarded as a communication from heaven. Such their nature that they could be understood in no other light than a revelation of what was to follow in the family of Jacob. The revelation concerned the whole family. As the revelation was made to Joseph, it followed as plainly as if commanded, that it was for him to make known the revelation to the family. In this way alone could they be expected to fall in with God's purpose, cease from their hatred to Joseph and enjoy God's favor. Now, what remains is for the commentator to see, not only that the act of Joseph in making known his dreams to the family was thoroughly discreet and righteous, but that his so doing was a grand success. It did break up enmity of these brothers against Joseph, it did make them honest and truthful, it did make them a happy family, loving Joseph and submitting to his rule—all this just twenty-two years after he related to them his dreams.

VI.

MOSES—WHY MOSES AND AARON COULD NOT ENTER THE PROMISED LAND.

In the investigation of this question we find there are two trials: one for the part Moses took in a transaction at Kadesh-barnea, when God was ready to blot out the nation—this in the second year after the crossing of the Red Sea. In this trial only Moses for the most part seems to be involved. In the second trial the ground of offense, or what seems to be such, lies in a transaction which occurred thirty-seven years after the other, at Kadesh Meribah, when a younger generation were giving vent to their rage against their distinguished leaders. In this trial both Moses and Aaron are alike involved.

I.—*The case of Moses at Kadesh-barnea.*

“Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither” (Deut. i. 37).

As for this first affair at Kadesh-barnea, we may well consider the construction Moses himself puts upon it in his celebrated review of God’s dealings with the people under his hand. In this review, when he comes to that rebellion which followed the evil report of the spies, he shows how God was so

incensed that, though hearing Moses' prayer not to blot out the nation, He swore, saying: "Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land, which I swear to give unto your fathers, save Caleb; to him will I give the land he hath trodden upon, and to his children." (Deut. i. 35.) Notice, this decree shut Moses out. Hence Moses adds: "The Lord was angry with me also for your sakes, saying: 'Thou, also, shall not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, he shall go in thither.'"

Now, let us go back to the time here alluded to, for it becomes us to know well the particulars of Moses' exclusion from entrance to the promised land. We can afford to believe what Moses, in his review, says, for Moses was one honest man. We intend to hold fast to those words: "The Lord was angry with me also for your sakes." This statement is made again and again. Let us know more about this. The narrative which we need to consider is given in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Numbers. It was when, upon the evil report of the spies, the murmurings of the people against Moses and Aaron rose to madness, and they were plotting, saying one to another, "Let us make a captain, and return to Egypt," and they were ready to stone Caleb and Joshua for opposing them, and the Lord Himself, as if brought to a limit in forbearance, said unto Moses: "How long will this people despise Me? And how long will they not believe Me (note, it is not Moses that is charged with unbelief, but the people) for all the signs which I have wrought among them?"

I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them; and will make of thee a nation greater and mightier than they." Here the character of Moses rose to the height of its grandeur. It seems as if God was allowing Moses to outdo Him in His own distinctive greatness. Truly, the world has known nothing outside of the Nazarene to surpass the response of Moses on this occasion. He pleads with God not to do this. Bad as the people are, it will not be for the Divine honor to let His promise concerning them fail. He reminds God of His forbearance at Horeb, and of His exceeding glory when He there revealed Himself as a God of mercy. "And now, I beseech Thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according to Thy word (in Horeb), saying, the Lord is long suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt, even until now." And the Lord said: "I have pardoned according to thy word." (Note what David says: "Therefore, He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses, His chosen, stood before Him in the breach to turn away His wrath, lest He should destroy them." Ps. cvi. 23.) He does not utterly wipe out the nation; but, that all the world may be conscious of His abhorrence of iniquity, what did God say? "Your carcasses shall

fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against Me, surely ye shall not come into the land which I sware to make you dwell in, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun."

How are we to understand this? For, if only Caleb and Joshua are to enter the promised land, then, evidently, Moses and Aaron are included with those who are not to enter. It seems as if right here we come to the force of Moses' choice—"Choosing affliction with the people of God." Moses had thus far, all along from Egypt, suffered with the people the result of their rebellion and unbelief. In this plea for God to spare the nation he wished it to be understood that he was still willing to suffer, if only God would not blot them out. Thus Moses' choice had a terrible significance, when we find it involved the sharing with them in the consequences of their unbelief. (Deut. i. 32.)

This we consider Moses' own interpretation of his being included with those who suffered the penalty of unbelief, in the words: "Also, the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying: thou also shalt not go in thither." (Deut. i. 37, 38.) Where the Divine pen says He would have destroyed them had not Moses, His chosen, stood before Him in the breach. (Ps. cvi. 23.) Moses virtually took his place with the people to suffer with them, and consequently, when God said not one who was over twenty when they crossed the Red Sea shall enter the land, save

Caleb and Joshua, Moses was in the number who were to suffer for the unbelief of the people.

Moses had persevered in his divine commission till he saw the formidable kings outside of Canaan subdued: and the time was nigh for Israel to pass over Jordan and reduce Canaan itself. Here his mind reverts to the early cleaving of his heart unto oppressed Israel and how his spirit was fired for them as oft as he heard of the promised land. He remembers well his resolve: how he chose affliction with the people of God rather than to reign over Egypt. It had been affliction sure enough—the hardest of all to bear, the continual murmurings of the people he was delivering from bondage—and now, as these troubles were drawing to their end, the hope of four centuries about to be realized, how could he endure the thought that, after all, he was not to participate with Israel in the fruition of their hopes. Thus it was that here, as if God in His infinite complacency and power could remove an impossibility, he pleads for the Divine indulgence in allowing him to just set foot, as it were, in the promised land. He himself relates the situation with that distinguished pathos which has stirred the hearts of all Bible readers from generation to generation: “And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to Thy works and according to Thy mighty acts? Let me go over, I pray Thee, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon. But the Lord was

wroth with me for your sakes, and hearkened not unto me. And the Lord said unto me, let it suffice thee: speak no more unto Me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, strengthen him, for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see."

There is not the least chance here to suppose that Moses was conscious of any wrong that he had done, or that he suspected God was alluding to anything of this sort in His denial. The reason given by Moses puts the wrong entirely on the side of the people. The Psalmist fully interprets this passage for us: "Therefore God said that He would destroy them had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath lest He should destroy them." We are here brought to the certainty—the Lord could not hear Moses when he asked to go over, because he had stood in the breach.

Here the mind reverts to the time when the spies brought back an evil report, and, at the pointed remonstrance of Caleb and Joshua, the people were ready to stone them—a time when God's forbearance was exhausted and He said unto Moses: "I will smite the people with the pestilence and disinherit them; and I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." Here is where Moses puts himself in the breach in his prayer for the pardon of the people.

We know the condition on which God consented to the prayer. Evidently Moses was willing to submit to any personal trial if God would not give up His chosen people. God consented to grant the request; but it was in this way. They shall stay in the wilderness till every one of them who was over the age of twenty at the crossing of the sea, shall die—every one save Caleb and Joshua. When only they two are left, then Israel shall pass over.

Thus there is no chance for any other conclusion than that the question of Moses' not entering the promised Canaan was decided at Kadesh-barnea thirty-seven years before he smote the rock at Meribah.

II.—*The case at Kadesh Meribah; in which both Moses and Aaron are involved.*

Now the case we have considered at Kadesh-barnea, where Moses alone is represented as standing in the breach and thereby incurring the doom of never entering into Canaan, is quite distinct from another which occurred thirty-seven years after at Kadesh Meribah; in which both Moses and Aaron fall again (at least Moses) under the same penalty; for the record of the transgression closes with these words: "Because ye believed not on Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given to them." (Num. xx. 12.) After this, as the death of Aaron drew near, we have the record, "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, saying,

Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the waters of Meribah." (Num. xx. 24.) See when Moses also was about to die. (Deut. xxxii. 51.)

The time had come when all included under the decree at Kadesh-barnea had died—all, it seems, but Moses and Aaron (taking it as granted that Aaron was included as well as Moses).

But the younger generation, that had been spared through Moses' standing in the breach, were becoming more bitter and provoking in their complaints than their fathers had been. Especially were they violent against Aaron. And this, in spite of the more signal judgments which they had witnessed, as when the earth opened and swallowed up the families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram before the eyes of all Israel. And when, thereupon, because all the congregation murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying ye have killed the people of the Lord, why should they forget how, on that occasion, wrath went forth from the Lord and the plague set in; which was stayed only by Aaron who, at the direction of Moses, stood with his censer of incense between the dead and living—stayed, however, not till fourteen thousand and seven hundred had died. Then, as if to subdue every remaining feeling of opposition to Aaron, and bring every mind into a settled conviction as to his divine calling, there was the affair of the twelve rods, Aaron's alone budding, blossoming, and yielding its almonds. It seems as if the very demons

would blush to see Israel from this time laying the evils of their condition to the charge of Moses and Aaron, their distinguished benefactors.

Here note what the Lord said unto Moses: "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept for a token," as if to keep in abeyance the spirit of rebellion. But it had no such effect. How soon, coming into the desert of Zin, they were casting their cruel reproaches upon Moses and Aaron because there was no water! Behold the record: "And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and the people chode with Moses and said, would God we had died when our brethren died." Now, here was the time, if ever, for Moses to lose patience and, as the Psalmist says, to speak "unadvisedly with his lips." But how could the Psalmist refer to this time? For what does the record say? "And Moses and Aaron went out from the assembly unto the door of the tent of meeting (with God) and fell upon their faces and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them." (Num. xx. 6.) There is no indication here that either Moses or Aaron expressed any resentment; or, indeed, had any feeling of resentment. They were too sorrowful for the emotion of anger or for words of reproof. They did hasten to the presence of God. As on the occasion, thirty-seven years before, when God was ready to blot out the nation, here again Moses and Aaron are on their faces in prayer. And was prayer ever more prevailing? Did ever mercy shine forth so unexpectedly from frowning skies? It was to be

the last wonder of that memorable rod—the last wonder, a miracle of mercy.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod and assemble the congregation, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes that it give forth its water: and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their cattle drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him.” (Num. xx. 7, 8, 9.) And here, when Moses and Aaron had gathered the people at the rock, there had been time for deliberation: and if Moses, as introductory to his speaking to the rock, made any address to the people, we should suppose it would have been with his customary wisdom. We think the address was in harmony with what we know of the occasion. He addresses them in their true character, indeed, and under the name which the Lord Himself had given them. (Num. xvii. 10.) Indeed, Aaron’s rod that budded was to be kept as a reminder to the “*children of rebels*.” Therefore he says, “Hear now, ye children of rebels, [let the state of the case be fairly understood] for you [who have kept up one steady course of rebellion against God] shall we [Moses and Aaron whom you perpetually taunt with being the cause of all your miseries] bring forth water out of this rock?” No apostle—nor even John the Baptist—ever made a more pointed and timely appeal to the consciences of men.

It should here be noticed that the words of the

address were intended to be heard. It calls on the people to hear what is to be said. But the Psalmist seems to refer to some instance when Moses, like Hannah afterwards, spake in his heart, when only his lips moved, but his voice was not heard. Accordingly the phraseology, "unadvisedly with his lips," cannot well be said to refer to the address which Moses made on the occasion of smiting the rock.

WAS HIS ARM IN FAULT, OR HIS ROD?

Perhaps our younger brethren in the ministry are not so fully aware as they should be that Biblical interpretations, even those that have been of longest and most general acceptance, should receive their careful investigation. For instance, Moses saw the promised land, but was not permitted to enter it. This is a Scriptural fact. But how long, and how commonly the reason assigned for it by interpreters, has been that he disobeyed God when he smote the rock instead of speaking to it. This interpretation has been so generally disseminated that we can hardly allude to the circumstance how Moses only saw, but never entered the land of promise, without the ready response: "He smote the rock instead of speaking to it." As for ourself, we are far from regarding the conduct of Moses here, as some preachers do "a shameful proceeding, a daringly wicked transaction." They compare this occasion at Kadesh Meribah with one similar to it many years before at Horeb. There, they tell us, God did command Moses to strike, but

here, they say, God commanded Moses to speak to the rock. This is not altogether a fair statement. In each case the rod was more conspicuous than Moses or Aaron. In each case the command is "take the rod," "and thy rod wherewith thou *smotest* the river, take in thy hand." (Ex. xvii. 5.) The use of the rod *to smite* is plainly implied. This at Horeb. How at Meribah? "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying: take the rod, and assemble the congregation, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes." In this speaking, there was to be something the people could see. As on the other occasion, the rod was to speak, and how could it speak, except in Moses' hand it smote the rock? Confirmation of this view is found in the transaction away back at the river in Egypt. Note the command there: "Take thy rod and stretch out thine hand over the waters of Egypt, that they may become blood." Nothing said here in the command about "smiting the waters." But how did he obey the command? Precisely as afterwards at Horeb and at Meribah. "And he lifted up the rod and *smote* the waters in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of all his servants, and all the waters that were in the river turned to blood." (Ex. vii. 20.) We might just as well accuse Moses of disobedience here, as at Meribah, and say he smote the waters instead of merely "stretching his hand over them," as he was commanded. And in another case (Ex. x. 12) the command was, "Stretch out thy hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts." In the com-

mand nothing is said about the rod. But did not Moses know, in all these cases, that God was to be seen and known in the rod? How did he obey in this case? "And Moses stretched forth his *rod* over the land of Egypt, and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts." Shall we say here that Moses lifted up the rod because he did not believe the locusts would come if he lifted up the hand merely, as God commanded? And, shall we add that unbelief was the foundation of this "shameful proceeding"?

Nor should there be any fault attached to Moses for smiting the rock twice. It should only be regarded as denoting earnestness, a determination on thorough work; hence, the statement: "And water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank and their cattle." There does not appear to us any more wrong in the two strokes than in the abundance of water that followed.

From these precedents we see no chance for the charge of disobedience in the use of the rod at Meribah, any more than there had been in its use on any preceding occasion. But without these precedents, Moses stands acquitted of the charge from the very nature of the case. If God commanded Moses what to do in order to supply the people with water, and then, instead of obeying God, he did something else that was especially abhorrent to God, and yet the water came all the same, and in the greatest abundance, would not this be putting a premium on disobedience by God Himself? Thus no one has the right to

believe for a moment that a miracle was wrought, except by doing as God commanded.

III.—*Some Things Restated.*

We have noticed that the complaint against Moses and Aaron is for some one thing that they both share alike in doing. This, we think, is argument against its being either the address at the rock, or the smiting of the rock; for these seem to be acts of Moses' own volition. Again, of only Moses it is said that he "spake unadvisedly with his lips." We know not that Aaron was a partner in this. Now, what does the Word say of *both*? When all the people gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, what does it say Moses and Aaron together did? Hear the answer. "And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tent of meeting—(meeting with God)—and they fell upon their faces; and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them." Surely there is nothing in this that has the color of unbelief or rebellion. And what else? "The Lord spake unto Moses saying, Take the rod and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock, so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him." It was a complete success. "He smote the rock twice, and the water

came out abundantly and the congregation drank and their beasts."

Now where it says "Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him," we think the just inference is that he followed the direction throughout and to Divine acceptance. Viewed under a just and strict criticism, we see only (as set forth in our main article) the exalted character of those two men as the servants of God. Nothing therefore is more surprising than what is appended to the account of the Meribah transaction. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye *believe Me not*" (What can this mean?) "to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." How the scales are turned! In the whole transaction from the time Moses and Aaron fell on their faces at the door of the Lord's tent and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them, not one hint of the Lord at any wrong in the people whose unbelief had become aggravating to the last degree, whose want of confidence in Moses and Aaron God had been visiting with miraculous reproofs, how happens it that, just at this time, when we should suppose the people would be ceasing their complaints against Moses and Aaron, the Lord should commence *His* complaint, and charge upon them the guilt of *unbelief* (the very sin for which the people had been so reprehensible) and, by way of punishment, say, "Ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them"? And, after this, when it is

said Aaron must die, the cause is referred back to this occasion, "because ye *rebelled against My Word* at the waters of Meribah," and likewise, when Moses must die, the same cause is repeated, "*because ye trespassed against Me* among the children of Israel at the waters of strife, because ye sanctified Me not in the midst of the children of Israel." There is no question as to the stipulation at Kadesh-barnea. Moses, in being denied entrance to the promised land, was to suffer for the unbelief of the people just as if it were his own unbelief. Now, when the children of the rebels that had been spared by the forty days' pleading of Moses at Kadesh-barnea are found, thirty-seven years after—when, too, God had taken so much pains to exalt Moses and Aaron before their eyes—gathering themselves together against these servants of God, how does the record here continue? "And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tent for meeting with God and they fell upon their faces and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them." Here it is not Moses alone in supplication, but both Moses and Aaron. And how can we avoid the conclusion that the heavenly response was like that at Kadesh-barnea, "I have pardoned according to your word." In this case, as in the other, if the people are cleared, their guilt (may we not suppose?) must adhere to an innocent party. Moses and Aaron both must die for they are not to enter the land because of their unbelief and rebellion at the waters of strife. Now was it really *their* unbelief and rebellion, or the people's? Notice how af-

ter this it seemed to be an effort of the Lord to keep this in mind—that, while the people enter in and possess the land, Moses and Aaron must die. (May we not say in their place?) It seems as if He must keep this in mind: that only as they die as the substitute, the innocent for the guilty, can the unbelieving and rebellious Israel lay claim upon the promise—pass over Jordan, enter and possess the land of Canaan.

IN CONCLUSION.

Are we not authorized in saying Israel was to understand that they owed their entrance into Canaan to the voluntary offering which Moses and Aaron made of their lives on their behalf at the waters of Meribah? Are we not authorized to compare the language of Moses as the time drew nigh for him to die, "Let me go over," to the utterance of Jesus, as He was about to suffer "If it be possible let this cup pass from me," and say, in neither case was there any absolute ruing of the substitutional engagement?

VII.

RAHAB: GOD'S HEROINE.

Sabbath-school expositions are sometimes unsatisfactory. And the case is quite remarkable if, where one errs, the rest follow. An example of this we find in the treatment of the fall of Jericho. With the Bible account of this event, the rescue of Rahab is so interwoven that it becomes unnatural and even difficult to discourse on the one without special reference to the other. But, as I read the exposition in a prominent weekly and saw no allusion to Rahab, I turned to another weekly, and then another, on up to seven. In no one of them was there any allusion whatever to Rahab. Do those who arrange the lessons for the year issue orders as to how the lessons shall be treated? And have all these expositors received their orders not to mention Rahab's name? It is just as unnatural to treat of the capture of Jericho and say nothing about Rahab as to discourse on the overthrow of Sodom and never speak of Lot. The escape of Rahab was altogether more wonderful, more illustrative of God's distinguishing grace, more instructive as to the use He makes of human actions in the accomplishment of His purposes, more so by far than the rescue of Lot.

What we know of the spying out, capture and

destruction of Jericho is embraced in two chapters, the second and sixth of Joshua; but more than half of the whole pertains really to Rahab's escape. Surveying the accounts together we cannot fail to see that God was just as intent on saving Rahab as He was in fulfilling His promise to Israel. He would no more have allowed her to perish than His whole project for Israel to fail. There is nothing in Scripture more interesting and instructive than the way this affair was carried on.

The long-expected hour had come. Israel was ready to cross over Jordan and enter the promised land. Under the highest encouragement of the Lord Joshua assumes command. "Be not afraid neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Across the river stands Jericho, that doomed city. Here consider Joshua's first movement. He sends out two men to spy out Jericho, saying: "Go view the land even Jericho." Under ordinary circumstances this would be considered an act of military discretion which would determine future movements: but whatever discoveries could be made, we do not conceive how they could lead to any change of measures for the conquest in view, when God had said, "Arise go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the Children of Israel." It was just a notion of Joshua's to send the spies. He did not know what he was about, but God knew. He could take that notion and use it for the accomplishment of a purpose that Joshua knew nothing of.

Nor did any one in all Israel know. Whilst Joshua thought he was spying out Jericho, God's eye was upon that solitary inhabitant who, though a native of that city and brought up in the midst of its gross idolatry and shameless morals, yet, when she heard of the wonders wrought in Israel, believed in Israel's God, and clave in her heart unto His people. Such was Rahab, the harlot.

That notion of Joshua—let us follow it to the end.

These two spies work their way into Jericho; but instead of spying out Jericho, they have more to do in the way of keeping Jericho from spying out them. Night comes on, and where are they? In doomed Jericho, indeed, but at the house of that very child that God is spying out. Is not this an interesting case—how they, who are of one heart, do somehow find one another out? How they do get together—the spies and Rahab—God's three?

Rahab is all for Israel. Though at the imminent risk of her life, she is going to do what she can. She does not hesitate to save those men of Israel. She has them well hid in the flax on the roof of her house. But soon the officers of the king are at her door, with a demand such as we should suppose would have thrown any woman, however self-possessed, entirely off her poise. It is a direct message from the king to Rahab. "Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house; for they be come to search out all the country." With no particle of perturbation, what a straightforward reply she makes: "There came men unto me,

but I wist not whence they were: and it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out. Whither the men went I wot not."

This reply saved the spies and, perhaps, herself from immediate execution. And yet, right here, where faith was doing its chief work for the present safety of the parties, the expositors think Rahab uttered a falsehood; and they labor at length to show in what sense the Apostle's commendation of her conduct is to be understood. This is all labor for nothing. It is just as easy to admit that her reply was all true as to maintain that any part of it was a lie. Because it was so complete in its nature to mislead, we have no reason to doubt that it leads us to the facts in the case, not away from them. We believe it was a statement of facts, not a fabrication of falsehood, that hurried the officers away from her door.

Those two Israelites, it may be presumed, had seen Rahab before night fall. In spite of their effort to shun observation, they may have ventured where they unexpectedly found a woman's penetrating eye upon them; but instead of inspiring a sense of danger it may have encouraged the strangers to some word of inquiry; and there may have been something in the tone and manner of the reply which, as the night was coming on, was found drawing the strangers to Rahab's house. And once there and having arranged for their lodging, is it strange that they had the delicacy to withdraw and so be at her house and endanger it as little as possible? They went out, as

Rahab says, and they returned when it was later, and, therefore, safe to be there. Does not the sequel prove that they returned a little too soon? We see, then, there is no good reason for even an intimation that Rahab, in her reply to the message from the king, said anything that was not strictly true. "There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were"—this the state of the case when the men first called there. Then she tells how, about the time of the shutting of the gate, the men went out—whither they went she knew not. What expositor has any shadow of right to say it was not so?

The reply was wonderful; but the wonder lies not in her ability to invent on the spur of the moment a number of lies all harmonizing to her purpose, but in her instantanèous selection of what must be revealed and what not revealed. She says the men came, she knew not whence; but she does not say they arranged for lodging there. She says they went away and tells the time, but she does not say they came back again. She did not tell all she knew—nor does a strict morality require this of any man or woman. As for the matter of speech, the fairest accomplishment even of the Christian character is a just conception as to what of all one knows he is to tell and what keep to himself. No one can doubt that Rahab had this invaluable gift. In that emergency she was competent to the task of stating instantly such facts as would save the spies and suppressing all others. No one has any right or occasion to accuse her of falsehood.

The officers are gone. Under this relief the spies

arise from concealment, but still remain on the roof. And what of Rahab? Her anxiety is only the more intense. The officers will return from their fruitless search, and she needs no one to tell her what peril will await when the rumor circulates that the spies are still in the city. What an earnest soul! No half-way friend is Rahab. All this interest for the strangers—how suddenly sprung up! And yet all that she knows of them is simply that they are Israelites! No thought of sleep—no rest—something must be done. What a creature faith is for work, for contrivance! There is a cord at hand; Rahab lays hold on that. It suggests to her an escape for the Israelites. She goes up to the men on the roof, for they were not yet laid down. There the two men of Israel and the woman, a heathen, hold a council together about as remarkable as the stars ever looked down upon. She discloses to them her reason for believing in Israel's God. She tells them what terror has fallen upon the people. Indeed, all that the spies afterwards had to report to Joshua seems to have been communicated to them in this interview which they had with Rahab that night on the roof of her house. "I know," she says in conclusion, "the Lord hath given you the land, and Jericho must perish." As her house was on the city wall she proposed to let them down with the cord from the window on the outside of the wall; so that they can return and soon be safe again in Israel. "But what," she cries, "oh, what of my father's house? Whoshall deliver our lives from death?" They certify to her, "When the Lord hath given us the land we will

deal kindly and truly with thee." She has full faith in the pledge. She let them down through the window. And then, as if a vision of what soon befell Jericho was before them, they foresee what uncertainty must attend the making of her family an exception in the universal massacre, and, whilst she from the window is advising them how to prosecute their escape, they in turn give her the explicit charge: "Bind this line of scarlet in the window, this very line which thou hast let us down by, and thou shalt bring thy father and thy mother and thy brethren and all thy father's household home unto thee, and our life for yours if any one of you is harmed." "And she said according to your words so be it. And she sent them away and they departed. And she bound the scarlet line in the window."

From this scene we pass to the hour of Jericho's destruction. On the seventh day Israel compassed the city seven times; and it came to pass at the seventh time, when Joshua had declared the doom of the city—no spoils taken—no lives spared; he adds, "Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in her house!" Now this was the same as to say spare the house where the scarlet line is bound in the window. Forthwith the trumpets sounded and the people shouted with a great shout and the wall of the city fell down flat! But it did not fall where stood the house of Rahab with the scarlet line bound in the window. And when the slaughter was going on in every street and house, there was only a solemn quietude in the abode of

Rahab, for all its inmates needed was to see the scarlet line bound in the window to be assured that nothing could harm them.

As the slaughter ends two men stand at Rahab's door. Who are they? Let Rahab come and see. They are the very men she had let down from her window on the outside of the wall. "And the young men that were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and brethren and all that she had." And then and not till then was all Jericho burned up.

Thus Jericho was destroyed and Rahab saved. These two parts are conjoined by God. The expositors have divorced the one from the other.

Such the outcome of Joshua's notion when he sent two men to spy secretly; saying, "Go view the land even Jericho." No miracle in the case, but was there ever a deliverance more signal and complete? Behold all Israel arrayed on the banks of Jordan ready to cross over; but the ark never moved forward into the dividing waters until God had His line of scarlet bound in the window of Rahab, the harlot.

We have spoken of Rahab as compared with Lot, but in reality she ranks side by side with Abraham himself. Abraham was taken from an idolatrous race to be the father of a separate people. But just as that people was merging into a great nation, God rescued this woman, and by incorporating her with the new nation makes Canaan equal with Israel in giving to the world that line of royalty which commenced with David, whose father Jesse was the great grandson of Rahab.

VIII.

THE FOUR WOMEN.

In connection with the genealogy as given by Matthew, Dr. Broadus, as we expected, alludes to the circumstance that the names of four women are introduced. But the comment he makes is quite unexpected. Having repeated their names, he says, "of whom three were polluted by shameful wickedness, and the fourth was by birth a heathen." Now, that their names are mentioned is a circumstance which, we think, calls for no criticism, whether favorable or otherwise, upon their moral character. The name of Tamar is mentioned because it is suggestive of the staff and signet and bracelets which themselves, we may say, belonged to the genealogy in question. These declared Tamar the virtual wife of Judah. Without them the lineage of Christ could be traced to Tamar only; and there it would have been left to the supposition of having commenced in illegitimacy. It was a piece of wisdom in which the whole world was concerned—the securing of those pledges by which alone the lineage of the Savior could afterwards be traced—and lawfully traced—back to Abraham. But for that discretion there could have been no such statement in the genealogy as "Judah begat Pharez," or those other memorable

words, "Jesus Christ the son of Abraham." The lineage of both our Lord and David goes back to Tamar, where the staff and signet and bracelets shine forth to authorize the linking of her offspring with the Abrahamic family. Thus the name of Tamar is the rock in the long distance which the pathway of lineage cannot avoid.

And the next woman is Rahab. Why is she named? Dr. Broadus does not tell us that Canaan, though conquered by Israel, yet, through Rahab, was equal with Israel in giving to the world that line of royalty which, commencing with David, was hallowed with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Israel wanted a king; Saul, the full-blooded Israelite, was a failure. God set up another in his place—the son of Jesse, who was just as much a Canaanite as an Israelite, his grandfather, Obed, being the grandson of this very Rahab.

And who is the next woman? Let us keep in mind the list—Tamar, Rahab, then Ruth. Who was Ruth? Dr. Broadus says that one of the four was by birth a heathen. Rahab was emphatically so; for the people of that doomed city, Jericho, were heathen of the heathen. But we conclude he does not mean Rahab, for that would leave Ruth to be one of the three he designates as "polluted." We take it, then, that he is speaking of Ruth as the heathen. But who was Ruth? The expository answer, we think, should be something different from what Dr. Broadus gives us. She was a descendant of that distinguished friend and kinsman of Abraham and Sarah, that preëmi-

nent Scripture worthy whose name was Lot. We know where Abraham and Lot were last together, in the king's dale when Melchizedek came out to meet them with the bread and the wine. They saw each other no more that we know of; but they met again, so to speak, in their descendants, Ruth and Boaz, in the wheat fields of Bethlehem. While Obed, their son, was just as much of the blood of Canaan as of Abraham, he was doubly more of the blood of Lot than of either Canaan or Abraham. Thus Lot, though separated from Abraham, yet, as indicated by the genealogy, was just as much interested in the Messiah that was to come as was Abraham; Canaan just as much interested as Israel. Thus, our Lord was not simply the son of Abraham or of David, but, as He was wont to style Himself, the "Son of man." Sprung from no one nation alone, He was to be owned and embraced by all nations—the Savior of the world!

A fourth woman appears. "And David begat Solomon"—it does not say, of Bathsheba, but "of her who had been the wife of Uriah." Now, the name of Solomon, as it here stands in the genealogy, could not be otherwise than suggestive of the high renown which the Jewish nation acquired under his reign. The clause, then, which brings in his mother in connection with him, is equivalent to a parenthesis complimentary to her; being the same as to say, "He, whose reign gave such renown to the nation, was born to David of her who had been the wife of Uriah." We have reason to believe that the Jews,

as all the facts in the case eventually came to their knowledge, felt a tender regard for her who had been wedded to the king under circumstances so appallingly criminal on his part, and melancholy in the last degree to herself. But to the dark and inauspicious beginning there came a most pleasurable offset in the subsequent faithfulness of the parties to each other and the honor that came to Bathsheba in that her son was so worthily chosen to succeed his father on the throne.

We have referred to the circumstances which, we think, made it natural for the inspired writer to connect the names of those four women with the genealogy of Christ. But we are sorry that our commentator sees no reason for their names appearing unless it is, as he says, that three of them were "polluted with shameful wickedness and the fourth was by birth a heathen." Now, on the supposition that what he says of the three (Ruth not being one of them) is true, we object to the way he connects Ruth with them. For, if he is speaking in disparagement of the three, he is also speaking so of the fourth. If the three were of bad character, what less should he have said of Ruth than that, though by birth a heathen she was of spotless virtue, ranking justly with Sarah herself as a mother in Israel? That phraseology implied that the three were egregiously wicked and that nothing better is to be said of the fourth than that she was by birth a heathen. Certainly the connection of Ruth with the rest should have been by way of contrast.

And now, as to the three, so far as they were connected with the genealogy, were they "polluted" women? Here, again if Tamar and Bathsheba were polluted women, then Rahab ought not to be ranked with them. What right has a believer in inspiration to speak of Rahab otherwise than as the inspired penmen speak of her; namely, as preëminent in the list of God's ancient worthies? Her call out of a heathen nation was altogether more wonderful than Abraham's. She, of wicked Jericho, the most corrupt city, perhaps, of all the heathen, believed in the God of Israel, though all alone in this matter, though not another one of her people believed. Abraham fought nobly and rescued his kinsman, but Rahab, even when she was unknown to Israel, ventured her life to save strangers when they were in jeopardy, just because they were of Israel. In short, she was of such estimation with God that He would as soon have failed in giving Israel the promised land as have allowed that solitary child that believed in Him, heathen though she was, to perish. Yes, He was just as intent on saving her as He was in giving Israel the promised land. What she had been as a heathen in no way detracts from her merits when, brought to a knowledge of God, she acts according to His will and leads a virtuous life. It is enough for us to know that from the time her heart melted towards God and cleaved unto His people, no particle of moral taint adheres to that name by which she is designated in Bible history as Rahab, the harlot. In the account given of her there are many things which indicate the habits of a

consistent life. Be this as it may, we supposed it one of the first things understood among Christian people that the greater one's debasement as a heathen, if, when he espouses Christ, he rises at once out of all that debasement and exemplifies only the higher life of the Christian, he is only the more to be honored for virtue. The position she occupied when incorporated with Israel was amply in her favor, becoming daughter-in-law to Nahshon, who was designated by God as the first captain of the Jewish army, the first great prince of the house of Judah. Let this suffice—Rahab, the harlot, beyond Sarah or any of the wives of the patriarchs, was God's special heroine.

And what of the remaining two, Tamar and Bathsheba? If criminality adheres to them, even with this admitted, they are the most extraordinary cases on record. As for the latter, the first child she bore David was the offspring of adultery, attended (though probably unknown to her) with the virtual murder of her husband. But the guilt of the whole transaction was so much on the side of David that, whilst our severest censure falls on him, our heart goes out in sorrow for Uriah and commiseration for his wife. In adultery two parties are necessary to the crime; but if ever there was a case in which one was guilty and the other not, this was the case. We do not know that, even in the beginning of her connection with David, Bathsheba was a woman "polluted with shameful wickedness." In David's confession there is no inkling as if anybody had sinned or needed God's mercy but himself. The parable of Nathan

presents David as the rich and cruel man. Bathsheba is his poor neighbor's only lamb, seized and slaughtered for the rich man's table. Before that first child died we have reason to believe that God's signal mercy had been extended to David in answer to his broken-hearted cries. Uriah was no more. And now for David to have put away Bathsheba would have reduced him to a level with the brute of a seducer who abandons his victim when he has effected her ruin. Upon the death of Uriah, David made Bathsheba his wife. She was his lawful wife. No pollution adhered to either party thus married. It is out of place to tell us that Bathsheba, as she stands in the double ancestry of our Lord, was a polluted woman. Neither Nathan nor Solomon, her children, was of polluted birth. Even in respect to the first child, whose death David so much lamented, it is quite a mistake to speak of a polluted woman in the case, for we do not know this—but we do know there was a polluted man, an intensely criminal man, in the case. Both Nathan, through whom Mary descended, and Solomon, through whom Joseph, were born to David by Bathsheba—(1 Chron. iii. 5.) She, therefore, was ancestral mother to both Mary and Joseph.

As for Tamar, here also, as in the case of Bathsheba, the "pollution" was so decidedly on the part of the family she had married into that she herself is but an object of shining virtue compared with them. "Pollution" is not to be thought of as adhering to her. She was fidelity itself to her marriage relation.

What was her offense? Simply this: She was determined on maternity; and on lawful maternity—maternity where, according to the rules of society, she had a right to it; namely, in the family of Judah. The right to primogeniture from Jacob, and therefore from Abraham himself, could not descend through Reuben, neither through Simeon nor Levi. It could descend only through Judah. Now, whatever advantage of primogeniture could descend through Judah, he himself, by choosing Tamar for the wife of his eldest son, had decreed that it should fall to her offspring. But this eldest son, to whom she was given, was too wicked to live. God slew him. And she, being childless, had the second son of Judah for her husband. His treatment of her was such an offense to God that God slew him also. At this juncture Tamar returns to her own father's house; but, without putting off the garments of her widowhood, she maintains the strictest continence, waiting, according to Judah's own counsel, for the third son to be grown. But she lived on only to see that time come and yet herself never given unto him to wife. Meanwhile Judah's wife, that daughter of a Canaanite, that mother of those sons that were not fit to live, herself had died. Evidently it was left for Tamar to consider it her right, under these circumstances, to be taken by Judah himself to wife. And here is just what she did. She took advantage of his libertine practice to achieve this end. She did become Judah's wife; was so recognized by Jacob. So recognized, indeed, by Judah himself when the sight of the staff, signet and bracelets drew from him the virtual

acknowledgment that she was his wife; else she had been stoned. Tamar probably, and her children certainly, rode in the wagons that took Jacob and his family into Egypt. In the catalogue of that company Pharez and Zarah are expressly named as his "son's sons." They were not illegitimate. Their mother was not a "polluted woman."

It is worthy of note that the Israelites put a high value upon their ancestry through Tamar. See this in the benediction pronounced by the people upon Ruth at her marriage with Boaz. "Let thy house be like the house of Pharez whom Tamar bore unto Judah." Who were the people afterwards known, and still known, as Jews but real Tamaritans?

When Jacob, about to die, gathered the patriarchal family around him to tell what should befall them, I doubt not that Tamar, who from the first had put such a value upon her identity with them, stood within the hearing of his voice. And when he came to speak of Judah, how she must have been thrilled with the prophecy; for it was virtually of herself. "Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies and thy brethren shall praise thee. The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be."

As for the three women first named, we should certainly regret their absence had their names been omitted from the genealogy. And as for the presence of the whole four, it is by no means a case where we find ourselves unable to see the propriety of the inspired pen.

IX.

ELIJAH.

I.—*False moralizers.*

We can understand how an irreverent tongue can make a kind of joke on Elijah and tell of his being "scared by a woman." But how a grave expounder of the Bible, when he comes to the account which is given of Elijah's submitting to banishment, should take occasion to say, "God does not need cowards," or apostrophize: "Ah, thou dauntless Elijah: now fleeing in cowardice," we do not understand except on the ground that the expounder is altogether *pseudo* in character.

To us, it is a matter of regret that the attention of the young has been so generally invited to this imaginary defect in the prophet; for, with the young, if you want them to hold a man in contempt, it is only necessary for you to call him a coward.

If there is really any justice in this complaint against Elijah we are led to think how, beyond what Bible readers have ever imagined, that venerated book is the record of cowards. What a mistake we have made about grand Scripture characters, since, in the light of this criticism on Elijah, so many of them are cowards. Expositors and preach-

ers have loaded Jacob with reproaches; but they have never thought of calling him a coward. They don't call Moses a coward, or David a coward. And yet each of these fled for his life; and with nothing to flee from, we think, so certain as the death threatened by the infuriated Jezebel. Think, too, of the New Testament cowards. How happens it that Paul should be lauded for his boldness? What a mistake! Was not he let down in a basket at Damascus? How secretly he fled for his life! And, again, from Jerusalem, from Iconium, from Thessalonica, from Berea. He arrived in Athens a fugitive. How strange it is that no expositor has even hinted to Sunday-school children that Paul was a coward!

Indeed, some of these moralizers on Elijah have much of the same fault which they deplore in him. They are about as doleful over him as he was over himself. One of them says, "It is fairly humiliating to human nature to see Elijah fleeing for his life and hiding off there in the desert." Here we could speak seriously and say it is too late for a religious man to show so little acquaintance with the experience of the godly. Shall we call such a man an expositor? An expositor of what? Certainly not of the New Testament. We should hardly accuse him of having ever seen or read a leaf of the gospel. He has never read what our Lord taught his disciples about fleeing from one city to another. Will this expositor say our Lord taught cowardice? Will he say our Lord Himself was a coward? Let him count the times on record that our Lord fled for safety—and

even hid Himself from the wrath of His persecutors. And are we told to look to the example of Christ—what He did—to see how low down human nature has sunk? Look to Elijah, shall we, to have a humiliating view of human nature? No mere mortal ever lived whose very name turns our minds away from earthly contamination and all human weaknesses, and carries us so far away towards heaven and God as Elijah's.

But the explicit charge against Elijah is that, "without waiting for divine directions, he took to instant flight." This reminds us to what an extremity the wicked will sometimes go in order to find an accusation against a good man. "Without waiting," is the charge. If a tree is about to fall, how long should one wait to get out of the way? What better command did the people of Johnstown need to flee than the message that the dam had given away and the flood was coming? Is there any chance to suppose that our Lord, or that Paul, was otherwise than obedient to the will of his heavenly Father when he fled for his life? Yet nothing is said about waiting for directions any more than in the case of Elijah.

When Elijah had made that first announcement to Ahab, God Himself told Elijah to flee and where to hide. But why did He tell him? Otherwise Elijah would not have known his danger. But when Jezebel made her threat, was there any need of God's telling him his danger? We may well suppose he had sense enough to flee without waiting for an express command.

But, if an express command had been needed, how

do the expositors know there was none? Elijah went to Ahab with his prediction about the rain and the dew. It does not say the Lord told him to do it. Why does the expositor here omit his chance for criticism? Why not say Elijah should have waited for God's direction before troubling Ahab? But who doubts that God did direct him?

Now, as for Elijah's flight from Jezreel, who, as he reads on, does not become aware of the clear presumptive evidence that God had indicated to him where he should flee? The interview of the angel with him under the juniper tree shows that there was an understanding between God and him from the start as to his destination. What else can be inferred from his being told that *there* was his only eating-house for his long journey? Clearly it is under the advice of God that Elijah takes in Horeb in his vacation tour.

But hurrying off without direction is not the charge in full—it is “flying from obedience,” as more than one complainer alleges.

Do they mean that he put off when God had told him not to? Whether they mean this or not, the charge is a libel. If Elijah were here to ask them to state what it was that God ever commanded him to do and he did not obey, no one of them could do it to save his life. If these accusers do not mean that he fled when God told him not to, then their meaning is that he fled to avoid some positive command. Why should these teachers know how to read, if as they read, they do not see that this accusation is in

conflict with the statement that he fled to save his life? Why, if they know how to read, do they pack upon Elijah the sin of Jonah?

We might think this accusation inadvertent, and that with a little reflection it would have been avoided; but it is repeated by the writers, one after another, often by the same writer. "He gave way to fear," says one; "The victim of unbelief, he fled from duty and did what he had no right to do. He was followed up and rebuked for it at Sinai by the Almighty." They put special stress on his straying from duty. They draw a lesson from his despondency under the juniper tree and wanting to die, by saying all *that* was the result of his running away from duty. This is to say he fled in order to avoid doing what he knew would be an acceptable service to God, though not a specific command. As this censure occurs so often, we have been led to make a serious inquiry as to what the "duty" referred to could be. Do the expositors themselves know? If Elijah were here to put the question, we don't believe any one of them would dare open his mouth.

"You are mistaken," says a friend at my side. "They say he was a coward, do they not"?

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, right in this charge is involved the 'duty' they allude to. What is plainer? His 'duty,' according to the complaints made of him, was to have remained right there in the Jezreel neighborhood and have had his head cut square off before the next sunset!"

Sure enough! It is just as the expositors say. That scene three days after under the juniper tree, with all its despondency, was most certainly the result of his fleeing from *that* "duty."

But another expositor accounts for his despondency in a different way. He says that "Elijah was sore troubled to find himself only a common mortal like his fathers." This implies that he had been all along a selfish, vainglorious man. (Does the expositor know whom he is talking about?) And he goes on—makes Elijah a peevish, complaining man, under-rating his brethren. "There are many such people," he says (such as Elijah) "who are forever finding fault with their condition or the people around them," and he continues, "If Elijah had spent the three days consumed in running away from duty in sympathizing prayer for his people, it would have been much better for him and them."

But who is the "peevish complainer," Elijah or his critic? The only way we can have any forbearance at all with such a moralizer is to allow him the advantage of being considered in the same predicament that another expositor assigns to Elijah; namely, "He was so blue that he couldn't speak the truth."

II.—*Saved from death, but not from false moralizers, 2,900 years after.*

There was much need, we think, that certain expositors and moralizers should receive some check in

the matter of unjust comment on the prophet Elijah. We rejoice to see what is done to this end.

Elijah has needed no vindication, that we are aware of, from the attacks of infidels. Who, then, would suppose that in this enlightened period of Christianity it would be made necessary to remonstrate against the reproaches cast upon him by professed believers in the Bible?

There has been a growing propensity to speak lightly of Bible worthies. This would be very unfortunate if prevailing only in the private circle, or on occasions where conversation is supposed to be more or less without reflection; but when the religious press, especially Sabbath-school literature, is made the medium for disclosing and dilating on the faults (whether real or imaginary) of such a man as Elijah, it will be found in the end to do more to weaken the reverence of this generation for the Bible than all the Ingersolls of the whole world can do.

I was aware how free our pens were to recriminate Noah, Lot, Rebecca, and Jacob, but was glad to notice that, when they came to Joseph, they contemplated his actions from first to last with no particle of censure. Happy Joseph, I said: And, as I thought of another character, I took courage for him. It was Elijah. Certainly, I thought, our moralizing teachers will have opportunity to expend all their love for recrimination on such characters as poor David and his son, so that they will be even glad to rest from this propensity when they come to speak of Elijah.

What was my surprise! The first I knew an able thinker was reminding his readers that Elijah had

his faults and, in confirmation of this, alluding to his "impious prayer." Now, the bad sense of "impious" is much stronger than mere *not pious*. We think Guiteau made an "impious prayer" on the scaffold. The phrase suggests a hardened, we may say, a lost sort of character. But if the writer meant by it a prayer that betokened only a temporary decline of faith, we see no cause for even this comparatively mild reflection upon Elijah. We think the case quite similar to that of Simeon who wanted to live to see the great prophecy fulfilled, and when this had been permitted to him, he had no care to live longer. And what if Elijah, when he thought he had finished his mission and could be of no more service to God, was willing to die or even requested of God that he might die? We have somehow imbibed the idea that it is the mark of the true Christian hero that he has no desire to live beyond that hour when he can no longer be of any service to God. But this request of Elijah's associates him more particularly with Moses. At the very hour when he had reason to suppose that the purpose for which he was here on earth was accomplished, there came that message from Jezebel. What if, on his way to Beersheba, it came to his mind how Moses, just so soon as he had completed his mission, was led away from the eyes of his people to die. And when he left his servant at Beersheba and went alone that day's journey into the desert, what if, as he did so, it was with the impression that it would prove the will of God for him to die there? Hence, what if the force of his request under the juniper tree is, "Now

Lord take me away just as You did Moses"? He wants nothing better than to die as Moses did. We think this is the significance of the words "for I am no better than my fathers."

Well, he never died as Moses did; but, when he came back to earth, he brought Moses with him. There we see them together on the Mount of Transfiguration holding an interview with the Lord of Glory. We believe that Elijah lived in the consciousness of his identification with Moses as, like him, having been called to special work by God; and it cannot be counted to him as evidence that he had lost his faith in God, if he had gathered the idea that, like Moses, his task completed, he was to be hid away by God's own hand forever from the eyes of men. We consider it one of the most striking instances of human presumption for a mortal or any number of mortals to sit in judgment over either party, whether God or Elijah, for what was said or done under the juniper tree.

And what came next? It was a scholar, who, as if apprehensive that his readers might overrate Elijah on account of his remarkable exit from earth, reminds them how he has doubtless been surpassed in holiness by others not thus honored. "Elisha, who was not translated, he says, had double the spirit that characterized Elijah's greatness," quoting in proof the words, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Was it any wonder that I was amazed at this? For it looks as if the writer was willing to sacrifice his character as a scholar in order to *under-rate* the prophet. Indeed, how could he suppose

that the common reader would not know that a "portion" of an estate cannot mean the *whole* of that estate; and that two such portions cannot mean the double of that estate? Besides, how could we commend Elisha if he craved twice the eminence of Elijah? Such an inordinate desire would have had the tinge of selfishness and vainglory about it—would have been a reflection, indeed, upon Elijah's rank—as if Elijah was but half the man of God, that he, Elisha, was aspiring to become. But what was the truth as to that request? It implied that Elisha had great reverence for the prophet, regarding him as his father—a father rich in the exalted treasures of the Spirit. He wants not the whole estate—much less does he presume upon any such impossibility as that of inheriting the *double* of it. But he does ask for a double *portion*—*large* portion—the portion of the first-born. And what is there in this to authorize the scholar to say that Elijah, though translated, had but half the grace of the Spirit that his successor had, who was not translated but died like common men?

What a terrible thing the moralizers make it, and how strange a thing, and how sinful, that Elijah, for once and so suddenly, should be found looking on the dark side! But there is no lack of evidence that they themselves have a remarkable tendency for looking on the dark side—of Elijah.

III.—*The traducers of Elijah.*

"Fleeing from a woman." And this the taunt of preachers moralizing on the prophet Elijah. They

forget that a woman's resentment may be more dangerous than a man's. As to executing threats, Jezebel was more to be dreaded than Ahab ten times over. They speak of Elijah's "deserting his post of duty." What post was it, unless to stay where he was—be foolhardy enough to stay right there and have his head cut off before the next night? And for not doing this, they call it "faith's failure"—his "fall of faith"—and scatter their falsehoods broadcast through the Sabbath-schools. But these libels on Elijah, how short-sighted they are! Foolish expositors! They do not see that by these charges on Elijah they virtually accuse Paul and even our Lord of cowardice, for quite a number of times they followed the example of Elijah in fleeing from danger.

To accuse Elijah of "deserting his post of duty" is an affront to God Himself. He had accomplished his mission—had brought the people in the most public and pronounced manner to relinquish idolatry. And when, for this, Jezebel was bent on his death, the mind of God evidently was for Elijah to get out of her way—do as her threat warned him to do, and leave her to fill up the measure of her crimes.

We do not see how an expositor can show more ignorance and misconception than to say, in treating of Elijah as he tarried under the juniper tree: "He wanted to die on account of disappointment." It was precisely the reverse. Contemplate his career from the time he said "no more rain or dew," to the hour when the fire lit down upon his altar—when the whole air resounded with the cry of Israel, the

“Lord, He is God,”—when, also, in answer to his prayers, the heavens grew black with clouds and there was a flood of rain: and where is there another such instance of a work of God undertaken by man that was so complete in its achievement as Elijah’s? Israel may again and again fall into sin and experience terrible penalties, but that does not affect the completeness of Elijah’s success. For Israel and all the nations of the earth are taught, in a manner never to be forgotten so long as the world shall stand, “the Lord, He is God.” But the miserable, libelous whine continues: “He was awfully despondent. The consciousness of cowardly deserting the post of duty made him so.”

The exalted character of Elijah in connection with the inspired narrative leaves no chance for a scurrillous interpretation like the above. Why not call Simeon to account for saying, when he had taken the child Jesus in his arms, “Now Lord let me die”? God had not revealed to Elijah that He had another mission on hand for him—and is he to be treated with contempt because, under a conviction that his work was done, he was willing, or even desired to die, and be forever with God?

The ministry of this day is fairly chargeable with the guilt of casting slurs upon Scripture worthies.

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